# The Nation.

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EDITORIAL

## CHALLENGE TO THE A.N.C.

When Nelson Mandela and South Africa's President F.W. de Klerk first talked peace, it was impossible to predict the consequences. But a number of anxious questions were in order: How would the African National Congress adjust to life as a legal organization? How would leaders of Mandela's generation relate to a younger, militant rank and file? And how ready might Zulu Chief Gatsha Buthelezi be to destabilize the peace process for the sake of his collaborationist claim to black leadership? August's paroxysm of killing in Natal and the townships has provided some ominous answers.

The violence began in the midst of an A.N.C. drive to set up new legal grass-roots structures and within days of the "Pretoria Minute," in which the A.N.C. agreed to abandon its armed struggle. A slew of eyewitness affidavits show how Buthelezi's *impi* warriors initiated the cycle of killings, and how the police chose to interpret their peacekeeping duties selectively, ignoring the *impis'* spears, axes and shotguns—a sign, the police said, of respect for Zulu "cultural tradition." Darkly, Defense Minister Magnus Malan warns the A.N.C. that it must not treat the peace talks as "a free pass to anarchy."

Buthelezi's crude message is that Mandela can stop the violence by dealing with him as an equal. Such a capitulation to terror would dismay Mandela's township supporters, who have borne the brunt of it. Yet if Mandela continues to play the more detached role of statesman—as he did, in effect, in August, with a trip to Oslo to speak at Eli Wiesel's conference on hate—he lends weight to the siren song of the far right, which rails at de Klerk for negotiating with a man who is not in control of his own movement. For the A.N.C. it is a hazardous moment.


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**THE SHAKY SHEIKDOMS**
**Dilip Hiro**

**BYE-BYE BOOM, HELLO RECESSION**
**Doug Henwood**

**THE EMBARGO ON ARAB LITERATURE**
**Edward W. Said**

**CARS 'R' US**
**Jane Holtz Kay**

**THE AVANT-GARDISM OF DAVID LYNCH**
**Stuart Klawans**


LIGHTING

## L.A.'S SMOGBUSTERS

*On the principle that, as Dante wrote, "a great flame follows a little spark," this article is the first in a series written by political organizers throughout the country whose work suggests strategies that could contribute to building a broader left movement. Eric Mann, a longtime civil rights, antiwar and labor organizer, is the director of the Labor/Community Strategy Center in Los Angeles and a co-chair of its Watchdog environmental project. The Strategy Center is a citywide multi-issue group whose entry into the clean-air fight in Los Angeles combines environmental politics with the politics of race, class and urban development.*

ERIC MANN

*Many believe that the implications—scientific, economic, medical, social, technological and political—of L.A.'s environmental confrontation foreshadow the showdown awaiting the entire world. If, with all its wealth, Los Angeles can't save itself, can any place?*
—The New York Times Magazine, *July 30, 1989*

At the University of Southern California recently, scientists performed autopsies on 100 youths who had died as a result of violence, accident and other nonmedical causes. Their discovery was shocking: 80 percent had "notable abnormalities in lung tissue"; 27 percent had "severe lesions." The pathologist overseeing the study, Dr. Russell Sherwin, said the youths were "running out of lung." In virtually every public health report the conclusion is inescapable: The air in Los Angeles is slowly killing us.


(*Cont. on p. 268*)


The Nation. 125


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# LETTERS.

## SEXIST TOOL

*Minneapolis*

Christopher Hitchens's venture into the turgid thrills of cultural criticism was almost funny ["Minority Report," July 30/Aug. 6]. The spectacle of a middle-aged white guy who decides to get down and talk trash for a bit has comic potential. But when I realized that Hitchens's "close textual analysis" of 2 Live Crew's lyrics was just smegma of the sexist and racist variety, I stopped laughing.

Hitchens's reflections on the state of mind of adolescents (or, more precisely, his adolescent revelations of his own state of mind) are rather alarming for those of us among what Hitchens calls "the gentler sex" who like to imagine that the men we know regard us as human beings. Hitchens's declarations on behalf of "all boys" make me wonder when/if boys stop thinking of girls as "bitches," each longing to have her "pussy busted." Do "bitches" become girls, nay, even women, when boys turn 18, 21, 25 or 40? When is it safe to approach? I was hoping for instruction from Hitchens, who explained that "all boys do wish something like this at one time or another, if not the entire time." The "something like this" followed the declaration of lyricist Luther Campbell's intent to "tear the pussy open." Does this mean that all boys dream of ripped, bleeding vaginas?

Campbell, gleefully quoted by Hitchens, describes the unquenchable female desire to "kiss the head of this big black cock." Now I'm *really* confused about what all boys want. Where does this leave *Nation* readers, mostly white boys? Do they want a big black cock? Or just one to kiss? One possible excuse for this confusion is that Hitchens mistook his penis for his pen and used the wrong tool for the job. Whatever the excuse, it's a shoddy piece of work to trumpet the Crew's vile woman-hating as "self-satire."

For those of us who labor along in progressive education or are committed to kids or battered families in other ways, Hitchens's remarks are sickening. By trivializing the murderous consequences of this confusion of lust and aggression, Hitchens's sophistry aggrandizes brutal sexual imagery, the cultural noise that accompanies rape, woman/wife beating (Jack "kicked Jill in the ass/'Cause she couldn't make him cum"), and the sexual and physical abuse of children.

Granted, censoring this venom is both wrong and pointless—it justifies repression and by the act of forbidding functions as promotion. But we can and should challenge kids (and middle-aged Marxists) not to accept these violent, misogynous lyrics as the rhythms of their own sexuality. *Flo Golod*

## MALE SUPREMACIST

*Mt. Pleasant, Mich.*

Christopher Hitchens's defense of 2 Live Crew's First Amendment right of freedom of expression extends, unfortunately, to endorsing their "very funny" and even "eternal" sexist lyrics. This isn't surprising, given his earlier recommendation in *The Nation*'s pages that pregnant women relinquish their right of choice.

These male supremacists help perpetuate a climate of male violence against women in this country that is revealed in more than just statistics (2 million women who are battered and more than 300,000 who are raped each year). For women in general this means going in fear in a thousand ways, which men cause and which men must end. Let Hitchens practice his misogyny where it will be appreciated—in the pages of *National Review* or *Sports Illustrated*. *Norman Rasulis*

## LET GEORGE DO IT

*Altadena, Calif.*

George Will, in a racist column in the July 30 *Newsweek* on the reception table in my office, recognizes 2 Live Crew's lyrics as reflecting hatred of women and connected with sexual violence against them. In the *Nation* on my coffee table, Hitchens finds their "attitude toward the gentler sex" merely "foulmouthed." It's depressing. Hitchens is almost enough to make George Will look good. *Laurie Taylor*

## MAN'S STATE

*Chicago*

True to form, Christopher Hitchens, the man whose vision of socialism is a society where women are forced to bear unwanted children for the good of the state, chooses to defend not merely 2 Live Crew's First Amendment right to perform misogynist lyrics, but their misogyny itself—it amuses him, he tells us. Of course it does. When Hitchens imagines the public sphere, socialism and, it seems, sexuality, he can envision these only in terms of male subjecthood: the experiences of men organized for men and for male pleasure. Male subjectivity, I'm sorry to have to inform the oblivious Hitchens, is not universal. He attributes lines about "busted pussies" to "the pains and joys of adolescence." Whose adolescence? Has it occurred to him that male and female adolescences differ, that the experience of "busting pussy" differs from the experience of having one's pussy busted? *Laura Spencer*

## WHITE BOYS

*Columbia, Mo.*

If Luther Campbell were a white boy singing about kicking Jack the nigger in the ass 'cause he wouldn't fetch Jill a cup of water, I doubt that Hitchens would be laughing. If 2 Live Crew were white-boy freaks in heat singing about catching niggers by the toe 'cause their appetite is lynching, would *The Nation* be printing exaltations of white supremacist culture? After all, if "boys will be boys," then why not "white boys will be white boys"?

If men were raped and beaten as often as women are, would Hitchens still be laughing? *Leslie J. Matthews*

## YOUR JOYSTICK

*Princeton, N.J.*

Is Christopher Hitchens having a nervous breakdown? His "Minority Report" for February 13, 1989, which I admired, was another "close textual analysis," this time of the recreational songbook of the 77th Tactical Fighter Squadron of the U.S. Air Force, based just outside Hitchens's hometown of Oxford, England. There our author connected military violence, specifically the bombing of Tripoli and Benghazi in 1986, with "hateful attitudes toward women." Racism, sexism, infantilism are all of a piece in that column. Top Gun pilots see themselves as an "elite force who can screw all the dead and live women they want." While they wait for orders to incinerate the "Persian-pukes," they warble of "Cunt Valley where Red Rivers flow" and that "I fucked a dead whore by the road side." I wonder why Hitchens would disapprove of official macho-sadism in the U.S.A.F. and approve of it one year later from 2 Live Crew? Whether your joystick is hitched to a Phantom jet or you are wielding a club in Central Park, you are still, I take it, the quintessential healthy American male. *Dan Latimer*

## MUSCULAR POESY

*Chicago*

We are fuckin' pissed at Christopher Hitchens's analysis of the 2 Live Crew flap. In regard to the lyrics of "Me So Horny," Hitchens comments: "Here we have the pains and joys of adolescence, rather understated if anything." May we ask *whose* adolescence? Not ours, goddammit. Not 50 percent of the world's. When the fuck you assholes gonna realize you can't continue to speak as if your audience is 100 percent testosterone driven?

He then states that the line "Jack got mad, kicked Jill in the ass/'Cause she couldn't make him cum" is "very funny." Yeah? Since when is woman-beating funny?

Hitchens then goes on to add that the Crew's "foulmouthed attitude toward the gentler sex (*sic*) is a good-sounding excuse for . . . youth-hating" and bigotry. What about woman-hating? Sounds to us like an excuse, nothing good-sounding about it, for misogyny. So how does this strike you, dickhead?

> Who the fuck's defending my sisters?
> Piss in your own mouths, misters!
> Truth is, we don't need your fuckin' "protection"
> We'll just cut off your dicks, that's the correction.

*Mary Ellen Croteau*
*SisterSerpents*

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# CONTENTS.

Volume 251, Number 8


## LETTERS
258

## EDITORIALS
257 Challenge to the A.N.C.
259 The Next Stage
260 Unions Yes—But
261 Overt Inaction *David MacMichael*

## COLUMNS
261 Change of Seasons *Calvin Trillin*
262 Minority Report *Christopher Hitchens*
263 Watching Rights *Aryeh Neier*

Illustrations by Marshall Arisman

## ARTICLES
257 Lighting a Spark: L.A.'s Smogbusters *Eric Mann*
264 The Shaky Sheikdoms: Uneasy Lie the Oil Kings' Heads *Dilip Hiro*
266 Sheiks, Rattle and Slump: Bye-Bye Boom, Hello Recession *Doug Henwood*

## BOOKS & THE ARTS
278 Embargoed Literature *Edward W. Said*
280 Applying the Brakes *Jane Holtz Kay*
282 Notre Dame des Tourists (poem) *Debora Greger*
284 Films *Stuart Klawans*
286 Trees in the Night (poem) *David Baker*



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# EDITORIALS.

## The Next Stage

The first round of the Oil War has ended with Saddam Hussein still alive, Kuwait still under Iraqi control and the Western guest-hostages still scattered in the sands around Iraq's military-industrial complex, such as it may be. For sheer survival, Saddam gets the round, on points. President Bush blew his chance for a quick score when he rejected the "Israeli scenario" and decided against pre-emptive airstrikes on Iraqi targets—the "surgical and progressive" attacks recommended by Henry Kissinger in *The Washington Post* and *tummel*ed by Israel's personal messengers to the *New York Times* Op-Ed page, William Safire and A.M. Rosenthal. Why Bush blinked is still a mystery. It may be that he has not yet developed a stomach for mayhem and carnage in the tradition of Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon. Or perhaps some White House wise guy convinced him that it was a grotesque and counterproductive idea from the start. In any case, the surgical window has now closed, and a period of stalemate has begun.

As Kissinger and others had predicted (their diagnoses are always better than their prescriptions), time is not on America's side in this war. The contradictions build by the day like desert dunes. The U.S. news media, which has ballyhooed the battle against Iraq as much as any fight since Hearst demanded revenge for the sinking of the Maine, has slowly begun to ask questions, suggest diplomatic alternatives and needle Bush. There are cracks in public support—most notably, the high disapproval rating from blacks for

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military action. (As much as student protest, it was black alienation, at home and "in country," that made it all but impossible for Nixon to pursue the war in Vietnam after 1969.) Even Congress is said to be worried about the costs of a long engagement.

The economics of the intervention are already apparent (see Doug Henwood, page 266). The Pentagon has doubled the estimate of the monthly cost involved, to about $2.5 billion (and that will doubtless be doubled again before long). The grand coalition that Bush is credited with creating to advance his cause is grandly unstable. Europe is in no mood for a real fight, the Arab leaders bribed or cajoled into sending troops to Saudi Arabia are nervously looking over their shoulders for possible coups or uprisings, and the United Nations is determined to slow the momentum toward a regional explosion.

Already many parties to the affair are worried about the postwar configuration of politics in the area. Will Israel finally be forced to attend the U.N. conference on the occupation of the West Bank, Golan, Gaza and Jerusalem that it has been avoiding for a quarter-century? The idea that Syria's Hafez al-Assad, the Demon of Damascus, now has a stake in the U.S.-led coalition can hardly be happy news in Tel Aviv. And the various sheikdoms, sultanates, emirates and kingdoms of Arabia must see that all that stands between them and some republican future is the presence of a few hundred thousand American troops.

Bush's next chance at breaking the stalemate that could ultimately do him in will come in a few months, when the tanks, landing craft and Marine divisions will be in place and ready to launch an all-out attack on Kuwait, at least. Then, of course, a provocation for war will have to be provided—ordinarily, not a difficult task (remember Tonkin, Panama and Grenada) but complicated this time by worldwide scrutiny and the anxieties of the partners to U.S. intervention.

As the inimitable Jeane Kirkpatrick said recently, Bush "loses" the war if he does not destroy Iraq's military and political power in the gulf. If Bush does not actually invade, he will be tempted to keep his legions in the desert for years or perhaps decades to come. The rationale would be the "stability" of the region, but the reality will be the domination of subject peoples and their resources. Once the imperial path is taken, there's no easy retreat.

# Unions Yes—But

The A.F.L.-C.I.O.'s $4 million advertising campaign for health care reform, which kicks off on September 24 with thirty-second spots on *thirtysomething* and other popular television shows, exemplifies the timidity of the mainstream of organized labor and its failure to be on the cutting edge of social change.

The TV spots don't spell out any specific proposals—not because of the constraints of television advertising but because after nearly two years of studies, commissions, resolutions and meetings the A.F.L.-C.I.O. hasn't come up with any, legislative or otherwise. Beyond enunciating a set of general principles, big labor's diagnosis and prescription essentially read: The system's broke. Please fix it.

Although labor is not alone in failing to offer specific remedies for the present health care problem, a broad spectrum of Americans are crying for reform. So why does the A.F.L.-C.I.O. shell out $4 million on preaching to the converted? Why mobilize thousands of union members for local Health Care Action days without giving them something concrete to back? As one disgruntled Massachusetts union member says, "We just throw away this mail we're getting about this health campaign. We have better things to do than spend our time having people say apple pie is wonderful."

The A.F.L.-C.I.O. is missing a rare chance to get out front on an issue that touches the wallets of millions of working people, union and nonunion alike. The international is stuck in what the union's professorial president, Lane Kirkland, calls "a negotiating mode." Kirkland does not want to commit to any specific plan or piece of legislation until he knows that it has sufficient backing from business and other groups to pass. Here is a painful example of labor looking for the wrong allies. The health care crisis does not touch everyone equally, and any solution brokered by and for the benefit of business will not address the multiple, interrelated problems of the working classes and the poor. And as with health care, so with every other social issue facing America.

Such issues should compel labor to look to its natural allies—beyond the circle of typical negotiating partners and into the broader community of people, organized and unorganized, industrial and service sector, in the shop or the office or home, who have the same fundamental interests. Throughout the country there are unions that, to differing degrees of success, have made those connections. In Massachusetts, Hotel Workers Local 26 changed labor law to make housing a collective bargaining issue. In Louisiana, locked-out B.A.S.F. chemical workers built a vast coalition, with interstate and international cooperation, to oppose the West German multinational's environmental and labor policies. And in the most celebrated recent case, the Pittston coal miners in southwestern Virginia organized whole communities which came to recognize that the outcome of the strike would have profound consequences for their own economic welfare.

In those cases, in the midst of crisis labor at the local level was forced to break with traditional bureaucratic styles of organizing, extending contractual demands into more explicitly social demands. Such efforts point to the ways in which labor could constitute itself as a conscious actor in a broader progressive movement. Discussions to this effect are already taking place, though on a limited scale, within the labor movement. In this week's cover article, for example, Eric Mann outlines a strategy for fighting for clean air in Los Angeles in which labor is central to an ongoing anticorporate campaign. Ultimately, organized labor's survival—certainly its vitality—will depend on its success at creating a more worker-friendly social and political system in this country.

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# Overt Inaction

The Intelligence Authorization Act of 1991, recently passed by the Senate, is supposed to clear up ambiguities in existing law concerning covert intelligence operations and strengthen Congressional oversight. Instead, the Senate version enshrines covert operations as a legitimate and routine foreign policy tool, expands the President's capacity to conduct them and gives unprecedented power to the military and other executive-branch agencies to carry out their own covert operations.

As though the Iran/*contra* scandal never happened and the revelations over the years of dirty tricks and bonehead tactics by the Central Intelligence Agency were all a bad dream, the Senate intelligence committee, in its report accompanying the bill, concludes that "Congress should expressly authorize covert action as a legitimate foreign policy instrument." In pursuit of this objective, the bill broadens the President's statutory mandate to carry out covert actions. He is permitted to order not only those that he concludes are "important to the national security of the United States" but also those that are "necessary to support the foreign policy objectives of the United States."

The committee, chaired by David Boren, discussed the requirement under present law that the President provide the House and Senate intelligence committees with timely notices of covert actions, a stricture that has been cavalierly ignored by Presidents in the past. But rather than set a time limit for presidential notification, the committee cites President Bush's letter to it dated October 30, 1989, in which he promises he will try to notify the committees of a covert operation in advance or at least "within a few days" of its occurrence. "Any withholding beyond this period," Bush goes on, "would be based on my assertion of the authorities granted this office by the Constitution." This sweeping claim of executive privilege was welcomed by the committee as a "commitment."

The committee frequently defers to presidential prerogative. For example, in the matter of third-party or third-country funding of operations prohibited by Congress, which was one of the major scandals of the Iran/*contra* affair and which strikes directly at the legislative branch's power of the purse, the Senate bill requires only that the President report that off-budget funding is "contemplated." The source of the funding need not be identified. Should an intelligence committee dare to ask, the President may duck the question by claiming executive privilege or by averring that to provide the information would compromise intelligence sources or methods.

The committee's report—the authoritative statement of Congressional intent—asserts Congress's right to "regulate" covert operations, but not to prohibit them. Boren and company say that "approval of the intelligence committees is not a condition precedent to the initiation of any intelligence activity." And any mention of Congressional restraints is immediately qualified by a clause along the lines of the following: "This provision . . . should not be construed as a limitation upon the power of the President to initiate such activities in a manner consistent with his powers under the Constitution."

Since Congress cannot prohibit the initiation of an operation, how can it dispute the President's finding that it is important to national security or necessary to achieve a foreign policy objective? Moreover, by making the support of a foreign policy objective a criterion for covert activity and making it equal to the more weighty national security criterion, the committee is all but saying that achieving any objective by any means is permissible. When Boren's committee declares that "covert operations are a necessary component of our Nation's foreign policy" and that they are "compatible with democratic government if they are conducted in an accountable manner and in accordance with law," it mocks itself. The law it has drawn up all but eliminates what little accountability to Congress has existed until now. Boren and his committee have tossed the bitter lessons of past abuses into the shredder.

The House intelligence committee, chaired by Anthony Beilenson, has not yet reported its bill. One hopes that it will repudiate the travesty produced by the Senate.

DAVID MACMICHAEL

*David MacMichael, a former C.I.A. estimates officer, is the editor of "Unclassified," the newsletter of the Association of National Security Alumni.*

**NEXT WEEK**

Robert L. Borosage and Lenni Brenner
On the Gulf Crisis and the Peace Movement:
A Whole New Ball Game?

★

## CHANGE OF SEASONS

*New movies, which are mostly dumb,*
*are in the summer*
*Even dumber.*

*The summer's when I feel most like*
*an ancient fogey,*
*Missing Bogey.*

*I'm grateful when fall's cooling*
*breezes come.*
*Back to dumb.*

*Calvin Trillin*

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# MINORITY REPORT.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

"The thief of Baghdad," "the Arabian nights," "So-and-so of Arabia" (fill out as applicable). I never cease to wonder at the commentators' fealty to cliché. Have you ever read a dispatch from the "Middle East"—to whom is it eastern? to whom is it middle?—that did not clutter the scene with either a reference to the muezzin in his minaret "calling the faithful to prayer" or a knowing description of the tiny cups of bitter (or, admittedly, sometimes sweet) coffee that circulate in the souk? Deafened by muezzins and overdosed on caffeine, I nevertheless cleave to my own image, oddly neglected by the *lumpen* writers, which is *Appointment in Samarra*. Those who know the story may not know that Samarra is in Mesopotamia; those who don't know the story at least know the title; those who know both have long understood that the phrase denotes an inescapable but unsought confrontation with the figure of death.

The young men and women who find themselves pitchforked into a prelethal standoff in the Saudi desert have been given little by way of instruction, aside from the usual ahistorical stupidities about Hitler and Munich. Nor have their fellow citizens. There is a sort of vague idea that America will one day have to fight militant Arab nationalism, so why not now? This is just the kind of fatalism that leads to pointless wars, and to the suppression of pointful questioning. How did we get so close to keeping this unwelcome appointment?

In 1916 the British and French empires signed secret agreements to divide up the Ottoman Empire after the war. As the United States moved closer to a military alliance with London and Paris, the text of the so-called Sykes-Picot agreement had to be made known to Woodrow Wilson. His adviser, Colonel House, met in New York with Arthur Balfour, Britain's Foreign Secretary and author of the famously ambiguous Declaration. House recorded:

> Crossing the Bosphorus . . . the secret treaties between the Allies come in most prominently. They have agreed to give Russia a sphere of influence in Armenia and the northern part. The British take in Mesopotamia and (the region which is) closest to Egypt. This is all bad, and I told Balfour so. They are making it a breeding ground for future war.

After the Bolsheviks captured and published this secret treaty, Wilson was embarrassed enough to proclaim his "Fourteen Points" on self-determination. The British Civil Commissioner for Mesopotamia banned their publication in the region.

In the interwar period, Iraqi politics and geography were decided in a rather freehand manner by the figure of Sir Percy Cox. Under the League of Nations "Mandate" for Mesopotamia, he drew the lines that demarcated the future Iraq from the future Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. He also had the task of finding a king, and he recruited one easily enough in the person of Faisal—a relative of today's Hussein of Jordan. Those who did not care for this arrangement, notably the Kurds of northern Iraq, were coerced by the first systematic use of bombing in colonial war. The British retained airfield rights as well as special say in the choosing of Iraqi governments until 1958. But by then, their position in the Middle East was being challenged by the forces of Arab nationalism on the one hand and American commerce on the other.

In 1955, financed by the Arabian American Oil Company, the Saudis had invaded a tiny oil-bearing enclave called the Buraimi Oasis, which belonged to the Sultan of Muscat. The British, who were the patrons of the Sultan, refrained from calling this act a piece of Hitlerite provocation but did dispatch forces to repel the Saudis. John Foster Dulles referred furiously to "British aggression" in this matter, and paid them back handsomely at Suez the following year. He was more than matched in vituperation by Sir Evelyn Schuckburgh, head of Middle Eastern Affairs at the British Foreign Office, who wrote:

> The fact is that the American oil men have gone into Saudi Arabia with this vast enterprise which utterly sabotaged the old economy of the country, without assuming any responsibility for the political effects. It is as if the East India Company had regarded themselves as "just neutrals."

A bit rich, given that Sir Percy Cox had been sent to Iraq from India in the first place, but no less useful a point of view for being entirely hypocritical.

Ever since the United States deposed British imperialism as the main gendarme in the Arab and Muslim world, it has made the effort to do its fighting by proxy. There was a time when the Shah of Iran was the magic solution; he sent his troops to Oman and readied a navy to patrol the Persian Gulf. This too made the Iraqis and Saudis nervous and jealous. Regional differences since the collapse of the Pahlevis have been managed by a combination of inept bribery and a reliance upon Israeli surrogates, with arms sales bridging the gap between the two. It is difficult to conceive of a more unstable or unworthy policy, which practically necessitated, among other things, the aggrandizement until recently of Saddam Hussein as a counterweight.

So now youths from Nebraska and Georgia find themselves guaranteeing "lines in the sand" drawn by Sir Percy Cox, as the mercenaries of a regime set up by an oil cartel. Pundits in New York and Washington, meanwhile, discuss the feasibility of a repetition of the bombing of Mesopotamia, apparently ignorant of the resonance history has in Iraq. True, there has been an apparent gain in the principle of diplomatic solidarity against lawlessness, but under current conditions it may be an illusory and temporary one. It was always foreseeable, given the bitter history of Iraqi nationalism and wounded pride, and given the venal nature of the surrounding cluster of client princelings, that, offered the chance to become a regional Ceausescu, Saddam would take it. Now that he has done so, and become only the most recent leader in the region to refuse to define his borders, it's worth scrutinizing the promiscuous, unexamined policy that put us on the road to Samarra.

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# WATCHING RIGHTS.

ARYEH NEIER

The war in Liberia, in which rival rebel forces led by Charles Taylor and Prince Johnson have been trying to destroy each other and overthrow the regime of President Samuel Kanyon Doe, has turned into a nightmare for that small West African nation's civilian population. Much of the country has been laid waste. Hundreds of thousands have had to flee their homes and thousands of noncombatants have been murdered, including many women and children who had taken shelter in churches and in settlements under the protection of the International Committee of the Red Cross. Members of the Gio and Mano tribes have been massacred by government troops because they are considered supporters of the forces attempting to topple Doe; in turn, rebel troops have attacked members of Doe's Krahn tribe and of the Mandingos, a mercantile tribe considered too accommodating to Doe.

Ethnicity is an important factor in perhaps half of the thirty or so wars now under way around the world (the count depending on the definition of war), including those in Sri Lanka, Burma, several parts of India, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan and Turkey. Many more countries suffer from violent conflict, short of actual warfare, along ethnic lines. From reports of such strife in various parts of the Soviet Union, Americans are learning of ethnic groups that most of us had never even heard of previously. These kinds of conflicts are also major concerns in Bulgaria, Romania and Yugoslavia; indeed, the last of these may not survive long as a nation because of the level of ethnic conflict. Israel and the occupied territories, South Africa, Guatemala, Peru and of course the United States all suffer in varying degree from seemingly intractable ethnic conflicts.

What is the explanation for all this? Why now? Although it would be a mistake to suggest that there is a single explanation for the worldwide explosion of ethnic violence, the Liberian case is instructive. While warfare on tribal lines may not seem out of the ordinary to most readers of news accounts of this awful conflict, it is strange to those familiar with Liberia. This is not a country where ethnic or tribal violence has been a significant factor in its recorded history. If any segment of the population has been the target of resentment, it is the Americo-Liberians, the descendants of freed slaves who migrated from the United States to the "Grain Coast" of Africa starting in 1821 and proclaimed an independent republic in 1847. Until Master Sergeant Doe seized power violently on April 12, 1980, Americo-Liberians dominated Liberian politics; they had also become the country's educated and moneyed elite.

The origins of the bloodbath of the past several months, therefore, cannot be traced back much further than the decade of Doe's despotic rule. Doe's predecessors were not exactly models of probity and respect for human rights, but his regime was from the very start characterized by a level of corruption and brutality far in excess of anything known previously in Liberia. Inevitably, this aroused the public's resentment. As often happens with such dictators, Doe felt the need to exercise more and more rigid control, to isolate himself from the Liberian public and to make certain that those closest to him did not betray him. Accordingly, he surrounded himself with members of his own Krahn tribe, gave them control of the armed forces and made them the beneficiaries of his government's largesse to assure their loyalty. Half a billion dollars in aid from the United States during the first several years of Doe's decade in power helped to provide the resources for this. The effect, of course, was to foster disaffection among the members of tribes who suffered from his cruelties and who also bore the burden of Doe's favoritism toward his fellow Krahns.

And what of the rest of the world? In many press accounts of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the standard line seems to be that the collapse of Communism and central control has allowed long-suppressed feuds to re-emerge. This is not entirely persuasive. Some of the violent conflicts in the Soviet Union, for example, are as lacking in historical antecedents as the tribal warfare in Liberia.

Within the Soviet Union, some contemporary ethnic conflicts are delayed consequences of Stalin-era forced resettlements. In Romania, conflict with the Hungarian minority was exacerbated by Ceausescu's nationalist suppression of their language and culture; the same is true of Zhivkov's requirement that the Bulgarian Turks adopt Slavic names. In Turkey the increased repression of the Kurds after the 1980 military coup, including a strict prohibition on their use of the Kurdish language and even on their right to identify themselves as Kurds, spurred Kurdish separatists to guerrilla warfare in 1984. In South Africa the violence between Gatsha Buthelezi's Zulu followers and other Africans is, at least in part, a consequence of the apartheid regime's determination to promote divisions between tribes as well as between the races.

At least since 1980, the South African Defense Force has been providing military training to Zulu battalions and has enlisted them in counterinsurgency campaigns against the military wing of the African National Congress. Also, Chief Buthelezi has enjoyed both the cooperation of the South African government in establishing his own rule over the Zulus and its tolerance of violent reprisals against critics of his Inkatha movement. Nelson Mandela's release from prison, and the outpouring of support for his campaign for a nonracial, unified South Africa in which majority rule prevails, must be threatening to Buthelezi. The appalling violence between Zulus and members of Mandela's Xhosa tribe seems to be a consequence.

Unfortunately, it is far easier for a repressive government to foster ethnic hatred and conflict than it is for a decent government to promote ethnic harmony. Worldwide, the last several decades have been marked by extreme repression, motivated by ideology, greed and paranoia. It seems possible that this terrible era is coming to an end. Yet the legacy of ethnic warfare will be with us for a long time to come.

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# ARTICLES.

THE SHAKY SHEIKDOMS

# Uneasy Lie the Oil Kings' Heads

DILIP HIRO

However the present Persian Gulf crisis is resolved, the monarchies of the region can never return to the era before August 2, 1990, when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. This date will be seen by future historians as a milestone. It marks the beginning of the end of these remnants of feudalism in a region that has emerged as the crucial oil reservoir for the world's advanced capitalist countries. For all their vast holdings of black gold, the feudal sheikdoms suffer from a severe shortage of democracy and human rights. They lack popular legitimacy and their economies are run by foreigners who have no loyalty to the rulers of the countries in which they work. Ironically, Iraq, by fighting Iran to a draw, gave the sheikdoms a reprieve. If Iran under the Ayatollah Khomeini had won they would probably be in a more advanced state of decomposition. Following the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran Khomeini launched an ideological *jihad* against Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the other kingdoms. He preached that the doctrines of Islam do not recognize hereditary power and monarchical succession. And he flayed the gulf sheiks for their autocratic and corrupt life styles and the exclusion of their subjects from the political process.

But Khomeini's campaign failed. Iran's army was stalemated by Saddam, who portrayed the war with Iran as a struggle between the Persians and the Arabs. And because Khomeini was a Shiite, a minority sect in Islam, he was unable to inspire the predominantly Sunni masses to rise up against their rulers.

The monarchs, of course, gave financial support to Iraq; their wealth plus outside help from the West and the Soviet Union helped turn the tide for Saddam. Of the $102 billion Iraq spent on arms and ammunition during its war with Iran, more than $80 billion was provided by foreign powers in loans and grants; $50 billion of this sum came from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and other gulf monarchies in the form of interest-free loans.

Despite this largesse, Saddam nearly lost the war, and he was subjected to immense pressures at home to step down—Iran's main condition for peace talks. But thanks to the indulgence of the West and the Soviet Union, he was allowed to get away with the extensive use of chemical weapons against Iranian troops, and the balance shifted.

*Dilip Hiro is the author of* Holy Wars: The Rise of Islamic Fundamentalism *and the forthcoming* The Longest War: The Iran-Iraq Military Conflict, *both published by Routledge, Chapman & Hall.*

Saddam received more than arms and tacit support from the West. In early 1987, when Iran achieved notable victories near Basra, Iraq's second-largest city, America intervened on the Iraqi side of the conflict by shoring up the U.S. naval presence in the gulf and effectively opening a second front against Iran. Washington could not accept an Iranian victory, which would have made Khomeini the most important leader in the region and would have enabled him to implement his policies of raising oil prices and overthrowing the gulf monarchs.

Access to cheap oil for the West and Japan has been one of the pillars of U.S. Middle Eastern policy. Washington has long enjoyed a cozy relationship with the Saudi royal family and with Sheik Ahmed Zaki Yamani, the country's oil minister from 1962 to 1986. Following the oil shocks of 1973-74 and 1979-80, Washington pressured the gulf's ruling families, particularly those in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, to reduce the price of petroleum, and by the spring of 1986 it had fallen to below $10 a barrel.

In the course of the "tanker war" crisis in the summer of 1987, when Iran escalated its attacks against Kuwait's oil tankers in retaliation for that country's financial and logistical support of Iraq, the United States provided naval escorts for Kuwaiti tankers registered under the American flag. America thus strengthened its ties with the Kuwaiti ruling dynasty, the al-Sabahs. So it was not surprising that Kuwait, along with the United Arab Emirates, consistently undermined the benchmark price set by OPEC by producing far above its quota. Before Saddam's invasion, oil was selling at $15 a barrel, compared with the OPEC reference price of $18. Allowing for inflation, this meant that petroleum was available at the 1971 pre-oil-shock price.

Cheap oil played havoc with the economies of Iran and Iraq, which were committed to postwar reconstruction programs. Iran, under its pragmatic President, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, tried to ease its difficulties by moving toward a rapprochement with Washington. Saddam opted for a quick, dramatic solution to his economic woes—annexation of Kuwait.

It is a most telling irony that, having succeeded in blocking the designs of Khomeini by shoring up Saddam, America should find—barely two years after a cease-fire ended the fighting between Iran and Iraq—that leader demanding (and securing) a higher price for oil and overthrowing (through force) a monarch in Kuwait.

Broadly speaking, the present crisis in the gulf could be resolved in one of two ways: (a) The Iraqi regime is defeated militarily or overthrown from within and Saddam is assassinated or imprisoned, or (b) there is a standoff between the Hussein regime and its adversaries and the Iraqi President agrees to withdraw from Kuwait in favor of a pan-Arab peacekeeping force.

The latter alternative would have to be qualified. Would the pan-Arab force pave the way for the return of the former Kuwaiti Emir, Sheik Jaber al-Ahmed al-Sabah—or

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for a referendum on whether the people prefer a republic? Or would Iraq bypass the Emir entirely and insist on handing over power directly to a republican government?

Of course, the question of the future of the al-Sabah dynasty will not arise if Saddam is ousted. The Western powers would hastily restore the former ruler to his throne, as a reward for his past services to Western economies and for the $100 billion worth of investments Kuwait has made around the world.

But even this victorious scenario would not solve the underlying problem of the political fragility of the gulf monarchies, including Saudi Arabia, which together possess 35 percent of the world's oil reserves. The lack of popular support for Kuwait's ruling dynasty was evident in the minimal resistance the invading Iraqi forces encountered. Of the 1.9 million people living in Kuwait, only 535,000 were citizens. Of these, only 60,000 adult males were entitled to vote. It was this restricted electorate that the Emir allowed to choose Kuwait's Parliament, which he disbanded twice between 1976 and 1985, a move he made under pressure from Saudi King Fahd, the Big Brother of the gulf.

The House of Saud rules Saudi Arabia like a private fiefdom and has yet to decree a constitution. It has repeatedly spurned demands that it share power with its subjects. On the two occasions it did agree to do so, it was in a tight corner and reneged once the pressure subsided. In 1960 the demands came from the democratically inclined princes in the royal family. In order to win their backing in a feud with his brother, King Saud ibn Abdul Aziz pledged to establish a constitutional monarchy and to create a parliament, two-thirds of whose members would be elected. But once he had consolidated his grip on power, he reneged.

Nearly a generation later, in November 1979, the Saudi kingdom was shaken when hundreds of well-armed Islamic guerrillas seized the Grand Mosque in Mecca, demanding the establishment of an Islamic republic and the severing of all ties with the United States. After Saudi troops expelled the insurgents from the Grand Mosque, the government placated fundamentalists by vowing to enforce Islamic law strictly. Crown Prince Fahd promised that an elected consultative assembly of sixty to seventy members would be formed "in the near future." Nothing came of this promise.

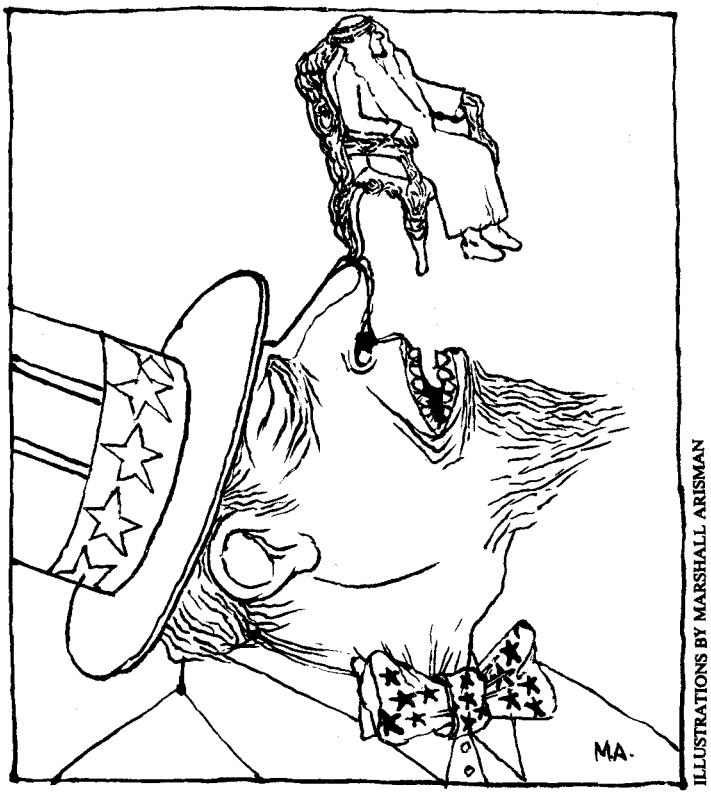
There has been no change in the corrupt, autocratic life styles of the senior Saudi princes and their entourages, whom Khomeini attacked as "deviant Muslims" who transgress the scriptural bans on alcohol, fornication and gambling and who deplete their petroleum reserves to satisfy the insatiable demands of the United States, the nation he called the primary source of moral and material corruption on earth. Saddam Hussein, a Sunni Arab, has now adopted the language of Khomeini. According to the London *Guardian*, in a recent letter to President Rafsanjani he said that he was following the political testament of the Ayatollah. Iran must find it heartening to hear its longtime adversary and rival in the Islamic world, Saudi Arabia, denounced by Iraq as an enemy and a U.S. puppet.

By allowing American troops to be stationed on their soil, the Saudi rulers have undermined their standing at home and in the Muslim world at large. It was already widely known that, following the Islamic revolution in Iran, the Saudi government had permitted the United States to store arms, ammunition and fuel on its soil, although the Saudis, aware of Islamic sensibilities and of King Fahd's title of "The Protector of the Holy Shrines," had never admitted it. Inviting infidel Christians to protect, *inter alia*, the holy shrines of Islam is an act that will not be easily forgotten or forgiven by the faithful.

While there can be no justification for the annexation of Kuwait by Saddam, his calls for a revived and powerful Arab nation and for greater equity in the distribution of oil revenues between rich and poor have won wide support from the Arab masses. By attacking Saudi royalty for betraying Islam, by conceding Teheran's demands on the disputed Shatt al Arab waterway and by pulling out troops from occupied Iranian territory, Saddam has enhanced his chances of achieving a rapprochement with Iran.

The prospect of an alliance between the two former enemies must frighten the five remaining gulf monarchs, who know that the ever-present republican elements, military and civilian, are likely to seek Iraqi and/or Iranian assistance to overthrow their governments. Were these autocrats to transform themselves into constitutional monarchs, they would have a chance of survival. But judging from their past behavior, they are unlikely to give up any of their power and privileges voluntarily.

The United States has long refrained from pressuring these monarchs to democratize their political systems because it is much simpler and more "efficient" to deal with a handful of ruling families than with the host of leaders of varied sociopolitical hues that a democratic system would produce. And popularly elected governments would not be

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as cooperative with Washington as the monarchies have been. At best, such governments would be neutral, and at worst, downright hostile.

Even if the aggressive Saddam were to disappear from the scene, it would not alter the fact that by linking itself uncritically with the feudal authoritarian states of the gulf, the United States has hastened the process of their degeneration and downfall. ☐

SHEIKS, RATTLE AND SLUMP

# Bye-Bye Boom, Hello Recession

DOUG HENWOOD

Whatever else it means, the dust-up in the Middle East forces everyone to acknowledge what most people already knew: The great Reagan-Bush boom is over. That wondrous thing had been flickering for months, its contradictions steadily sapping its strength, but there's nothing like a 60 percent increase in the price of crude oil to snuff the lantern out.

One reason the 1980s expansion lasted so long was the collapse of oil prices in mid-decade. In their May 1990 *World Economic Outlook*, analysts at the International Monetary Fund compared the expansion of 1982-89 with its two shorter-lived forebears, 1971-74 and 1975-79. Unlike the earlier periods, the 1980s were characterized by:

§ lower price and wage inflation, with wage increases largely financed by increases in productivity.

§ disinflationary government policies aimed at reducing what are called "structural rigidities" in the labor markets—i.e., unions, minimum wages and other irritants to the capitalist class.

§ flat to declining commodity prices, especially in oil, which dropped 50 percent in 1986, providing a windfall of $115 billion to the "big seven"—Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States—while taking a corresponding slice out of the economies of countries dependent on the export of oil and other commodities.

Both 1970s expansions ended with an oil/credit crunch, as central banks tightened monetary policy to bring inflation down. The 1980s expansion was very different, as credit remained plentiful and relatively cheap. Wages continued their decline in real terms; the price of oil, in real terms, held at mid-1970s levels.

These circumstances were pleasing to the global plutocracy, but the contradictions were obvious. With declining wages came the thinning of the middle classes and a decrease in purchasing power. The sharp rise in personal bankruptcies throughout the boom indicated that many households were financially "stressed," in the words of the Federal Reserve, and indeed the period has been marked by the

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greatest load of household debt in history.

With the gulf crisis has come freer talk of an imminent recession, but at some point, an economy fueled largely by credit was bound to confront the question of what to do when the money tap ran dry. And it has been running dry. Starting a little more than a year ago, the junk bond market imploded, and suddenly low-rated corporations and speculators were denied new loans. As the economy slowed and the financial environment turned nasty, moneylenders started getting nervous. One panic followed another. As the savings and loan disaster unfolded in all its gaudy splendor, government regulators began urging bankers to apply more prudent lending standards—something they were willing, even eager, to do. By most accounts, loans are now very difficult to get for all but the most creditworthy customers. It used to be that the Federal Reserve itself would engineer such a credit crunch to slow the economy; it seems appropriate that this expansion, characterized by the privatization of public services, has apparently been throttled by private bankers. Yet, in spite of this, inflation keeps on rising. During the first seven months of this year, it averaged 5.8 percent, compared with 4.6 percent for all of 1989.

The fact that prices are going up in a period of sluggishness is a departure from the textbook rule that inflation trends and economic vigor move in opposite directions. It looks as if the U.S. economy has suffered a relapse of the disease that the sadomonetarism of the 1980s was supposed to cure—stagflation. In more normal times, the Federal Reserve would have provoked a recession, but given the weakness of the U.S. financial structure, the Fed seems afraid to do so: A cascade of debt defaults and bankruptcies might turn recession into depression. Instead, the Fed has held to a moderately tight policy, hoping that mere sluggishness, rather than a full-blown slump, could bring the inflation rate closer to zero.

External forces have made matters even more complex. The healthier economies of Europe and Japan are behaving more like the 1970s expansions described earlier, with economic strength cresting in an inflationary burst. This has troubled central bankers and bondholders in those countries, and their nervousness took the form of higher interest rates. As foreign rates creep higher, it becomes more difficult and more expensive to attract the foreign investors who are essential to financing the U.S. federal deficit. Why should the world's moneybags cast their fate with the rickety U.S. financial system when investments in Japan, Canada, Germany or Britain yield as much or more? The Fed may have to keep interest rates high—or even drive them higher—in the face of a sinking economy just to bring buyers into the New York bond market.

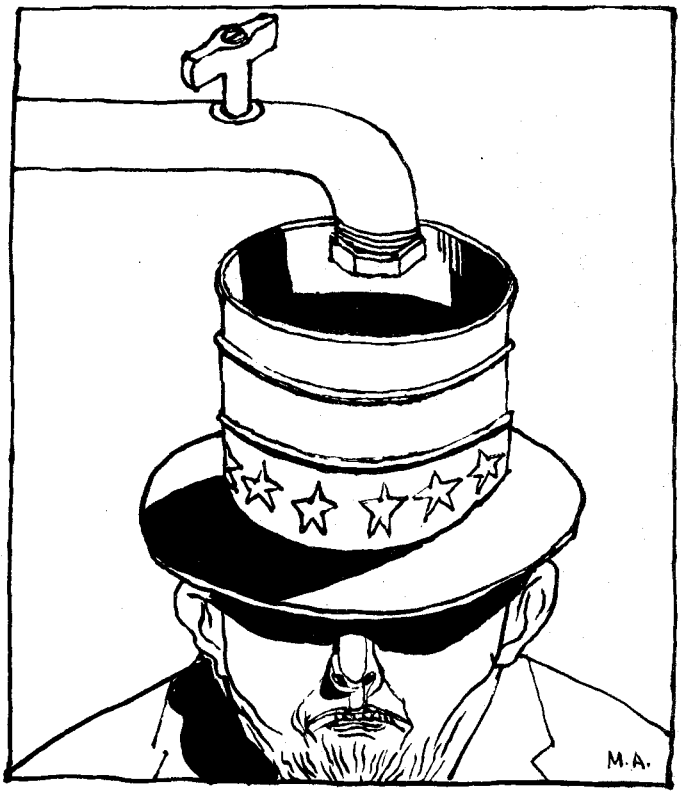
The weakness of the dollar is a sign that capital is shunning the United States. During the last ten days of July, the dollar lost 2.6 percent of its value; by the fourth week of August, it lost another 2.3 percent. Usually, in a world crisis the dollar rallies as capital flows into the United States in search of a haven. For the first time in modern memory, the dollar seems to have lost this haven status in favor of European currencies, a financial symptom of a loss of U.S. pre-eminence.

Saddam Hussein and George Bush, with his mad lust to humiliate Iraq, are tripping an already hobbled economy. The direct effects of higher oil prices can cut two ways: If central bankers yield and print enough money to cover the price increase, then inflation will rise; if central bankers stay tight, as they seem to prefer, then everyone but the oil industry will suffer.

Then there are the effects on business and consumer confidence. The best measures of the global business class's mood—stock and bond prices—have been tracing out a near-panic, though they seem to have found their feet as of press time. Among common folk, the gloom is thickening too. Every month the Conference Board, a business-sponsored research group, publishes a survey of consumer perceptions of the economy, present and future. According to this survey, consumer confidence, which had been falling for a year, took a sharp spill in August. A *New York Times*/CBS poll published in the *Times* on August 26 found "more people saying the economy was getting worse, not better, than at any time since January 1981, just before the worst recession in the postwar period."

If these fears motivate businesses and households to cut back on spending, then recession is a virtual certainty. As growth slows, or dips below 0 percent, the budget deficit will widen and the strained financial sector will start to scream. If borrowers couldn't service their debts with oil at $18 a barrel, can they do better with oil at $26 or $32? If the government is running into problems financing its $230 billion deficit, how will it fare if war, recession or both double the figure?

Operation Desert Shield is being advertised as a reassertion of U.S. imperial power, a bracing antidote to all those notions of national decline. In fact it is symptomatic of that

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very decline: an episode of pure military exhibitionism with no hint of a political strategy behind it. By viewing Saddam Hussein as a lone gunman in the Middle East, the Administration implies that once he is "taken out" (as the vile idiom goes), all will simply resolve itself. But Saddam is only the most visible symbol of a longer-term challenge to Saudi Arabia's role as the rich countries' best friend inside OPEC. With their huge overseas investments, the Saudi (and Kuwaiti) rulers have long identified more with Wall Street and the City of London than with their subjects and neighbors. This has provoked a number of resentments. First, there is the enmity of the poorer, more militant oil producers—Iran, Algeria and Libya, to name a few besides Iraq—toward the corrupt plutocracies. And second, there is the volatility of a population that has been living under a regime perpetuated by secret police rather than popular consent.

Now that Western patronage of the monarchy's rule has been made explicit, Saudi Arabia's political environment—domestic and foreign—should only get hotter. Instead of dispatching the Army, the United States would do better to figure out how to achieve energy efficiency, how to begin repairing the financial, and social, damage caused by the Reagan-Bush boom and how to bring peace to a polarized Arab world. Instead, the Bush regime prefers the armed defense of the unsustainable. □

# Smogbusters

(*Continued From Front Cover*)

Photochemical smog, the brown haze that children in L.A. have come to view as "the sky," is only the visible side of the problem. Of its constituent parts, carbon monoxide impairs central nervous system functioning; nitrogen dioxide weakens the lungs and decreases resistance to infection; ozone inflames lung tissue; and fine particulate matter acts as a carrier for other cancer-causing agents that lodge in the lungs. Beyond this, according to Michael Belliveau of Citizens for a Better Environment, there are 125 million pounds per year of airborne toxins that you can't see—trichloroethane, methylene chloride and benzene, among others. Of L.A.'s toxins, 14 percent are carcinogenic, 27 percent destroy reproductive ability, 11 percent cause acute disorders (many of them fatal) and 59 percent cause chronic disorders.

And as with all destructive byproducts of our society, pollution takes its greatest toll on the poor, on workers and on people of color. Most of the youths in that U.S.C. study were from the inner city; more than half of them were Latino or black. The scientists were careful to point out that contributing to lung disease were factors such as "poor hygiene and poor nutrition which predispose the youth to the harmful effects of frequent viral infections, smoking, air pollution, and other noxious agents." From the point of view of a scientific study, it is necessary to factor out socioeconomic conditions so as to develop a "pure conclusion." But from an organizer's point of view, the interaction between the injuries of class, race and toxicity is what makes the issue so explosive. In L.A., working people often live near freeway exits and on crowded streets, where idling cars pump pollution directly into their lungs. The metal plating and furniture industries, both extremely toxic, are located in Latino and black communities in East Los Angeles, Huntington Park and Watts. The people working in the electronics, oil, chemical, auto, furniture, metal plating and military plants are exposed to the most toxic solvents and chemicals. And while women in these workplaces and neighborhoods are warned about drinking, smoking or using drugs during pregnancy, there is no public outcry against corporate officials who knowingly discharge poisons into the air and directly contribute to birth defects and high infant mortality.

Meanwhile, residents of wealthier neighborhoods closer to the ocean boast of the "breathability" of "their" air—protected by location, lower traffic density and strict residential zoning not enforced in minority areas. Air has become a commodity. As one real estate agent told me, "Air quality is one of the most significant factors that determine property values in Los Angeles."

The County of Los Angeles reflects the demographics of polarization: great concentrations of corporate and private wealth, an inordinately large upper middle class, a rapidly shrinking middle class and unionized working class, and a growing corps of the working poor, the unemployed, the homeless and the criminally employed. This class structure is overlaid with the politics of race. Of L.A.'s 8.6 million people, 3 million are Latino, 1 million are black, 1 million are Asian-American and 3.5 million are white. Presiding over this largest industrial center in the United States is a small white corporate elite.

These facts portend a qualitative social deterioration over the next twenty years. Recently, *LA Weekly* published projections for the year 2010: 10 million people in the county, 5 million of whom will be living in poverty; 500,000 homeless; a two-hour average daily commute; an average freeway speed at rush hour of 15 miles per hour; air quality contributing to 100,000 deaths per year. These projections may be exaggerated, but the trends are not. If class and race contradictions are not resolved we could be seeing a Blade Runner L.A. on the horizon.

Although the solution to L.A.'s air-quality problem is complex, the main sources of the problem are simply defined: toxic emissions from autos and industry. Forty-six to 87 percent of the four major smog-producing chemicals come from the burning of fossil fuels by cars, trucks and buses, whose design, promotion and toxic nature are products of the auto, oil and tire industries. In terms of toxic air contaminants, the twenty-five largest corporate polluters are the source of 62 percent of the poisons in L.A.'s air. Despite rhetoric about how "we all" are part of the problem, it is the corporations that determine industrial and agricultural production, and they must be brought under control.

Barry Commoner has been calling for a progressive environmental politics that rejects a regulatory strategy and demands social control over corporate decision making [see "Ending the War Against Earth," April 30]. We at the Labor/Community Watchdog share that view, but then it gets com-

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# Has Capitalism Won?

In America income and wealth have been shamelessly redistributed from the bottom to the top, homelessness is rampant, drugs have even invaded our elementary schools — and that's just for starters — and yet our pontificating pundits have the chutzpah to declare, "We Won!"

But the archetypal pontificator in Rome — specifically, the one who's been a key player in Communism's collapse — dissents from this capitalist bombast. It's superficial, says the Pontiff, to interpret Bolshevism's bust-up as the triumph of capitalism or to see capitalism as the only remaining option. He says capitalism "makes people slaves of 'possession' " and promotes a grossly unequal distribution of goods — the alternative being a society where money and capital don't reign and where workers participate in the ownership and management of enterprises. The Pope a progressive? Don't be shocked! *National Review* has derided John Paul as "the last socialist."

You see, as secular reformers lose hope during these greedy times, religious people, with their transcendental commitments, are keeping the cause of social justice alive. *The Progressive* sees Christians and religious Jews as "the fastest growing" element of the Left. Not surprisingly, we at the NEW OXFORD REVIEW, an ecumenical monthly edited by lay Catholics, are energetically contending for humane social change and ecological sensitivity (according to *Utne Reader*, we "battle all the major assumptions of our consumer-crazed, growth-oriented society"). But we do so in our own unique "voice" — we're not captive to tired, predictable ideologies. The University of Chicago's Martin E. Marty, a Lutheran, says we "probe and nudge and jab in the hope of inducing fresh thought." Those who do the probing include such original thinkers as Christopher Lasch, Jean Bethke Elshtain, Robert N. Bellah, Eileen Egan, and Robert Coles.

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plicated. The anticorporate left is in disarray in this country, and the mainstream Democratic Party, trade union, civil rights and environmental leadership—all of whom represent large constituencies—have taken an explicitly pro-corporate approach. It is not enough to call for social control without building a grass-roots base for an activist, class-conscious environmental politics.

In Europe, political parties are the organizational forms in which the conflicting interests and cultures of the oppressed can be mediated and focused into an overall strategy. That is not the case here, but we believe it is possible to create, on a smaller and non-electoral scale, laboratories for exploring new forms of direct democracy. Thus the Watchdog strategy: addressing gender, race and class contradictions within our own organization; creating workable syntheses between environmental demands and the real employment needs of workers and communities; involving large numbers of people in direct confrontation with corporate polluters; and placing environmental activism in the context of rebuilding the progressive movement.

*We believe it is possible to create, on a small and non-electoral scale, laboratories for exploring new forms of direct democracy.*

Such a strategy must address a number of tactical questions: How do you sustain campaigns for the years it takes to win even partial victories when corporate power has so many economic and political reserves? How do you build permanent organizations when many individuals join to solve one immediate problem and may drop out if the problem is solved or if the solution seems unattainable? How do you prevent the co-optation of indigenous community and workplace leaders by union, political and even corporate elites? And how do you encourage a broader political consciousness that goes beyond an individual struggle or issue?

In approaching those questions, we began by constructing a multiracial organizing committee and combining research on the problem of the air with wider political discussions, both to clarify our own ideas and to encourage debate. Although our group is new to the community, the players are not. Chris Mathis works at the G.M. Van Nuys plant and is a longtime leader of the Campaign to Keep G.M. Van Nuys Open. Laura Pulido, a Ph.D. candidate from East Los Angeles studying the history of environmental activism in the Latino community, works closely with Amy Shimshon, a Watchdog researcher who is studying the public health impact of air toxins. Peace activists Kate Kinkade and Patrick Ramsey run their own businesses. Jay and Anne Brophy are members of the operating engineers union, and Anne is working to get more women into the building trades. Aron Rael, an environmental activist originally from New Mexico, develops curriculums for Latino community organizations in Los Angeles. Somini Sengupta, a union researcher, is developing working contacts with Asian-American communities. Michael Picker, West Coast director of the National Toxics Campaign, provides technical expertise. Michele Prichard worked closely with Barry Commoner and has directed several multi-issue coalitions in Los Angeles. Stephanie O'Neal is active in the pro-choice movement. Anne Holmes works in a community mental health facility for the homeless. Cynthia Hamilton, a professor of Pan-African studies, has been active in the black community's fight against the Lancer incineration project, and I worked in the G.M. Van Nuys plant for five years before becoming involved with the Watchdog. This organizing committee is supplemented by other Strategy Center activists who come in at critical junctures in the work, such as Anthony Thigpenn, director of Jobs with Peace; Rudy Acuña, a professor of Chicano studies at Cal State Northridge; Gilbert Cedillo from Service Employees International Union Local 660; and Mark Masaoka, an elected union local officer and member of the national board of New Directions, a reform caucus in the United Auto Workers.

The political context that we hope to shape is defined in part by the actions of the South Coast Air Quality Management District, a multicounty regulatory agency. While A.Q.M.D. director James Lents (who "may well be the most powerful man in Southern California," according to *Forbes*) and his staff are making an unusually energetic intervention to clean up L.A.'s air, their game plan is fundamentally flawed.

To begin with, they approach the work from a technical rather than a public health perspective, and success or failure is measured by meeting timetables to reduce the concentration of four smog-producing pollutants to levels determined by the Environmental Protection Agency and the state. But because the A.Q.M.D. is mandated primarily to reduce smog and not the many other pollutants and carcinogens in the air, it has restricted its targets, regulating small furniture factories that produce reactive organic gases that contribute to smog but paying little attention to the Unocal refinery's production of butadiene, the single greatest cancer threat in the county.

Moreover, the A.Q.M.D. is caught in a political contradiction: The powerful economic and political forces that it must "regulate" also dominate the governmental structures that regulate it. No sooner had the agency geared up its twenty-year plan in June 1989 than the State Air Resources Board placed a sixty-day hold on the plan, saying it "created great mistrust between the A.Q.M.D. and the business community." In that interval the A.Q.M.D. extended the giant utility Southern California Edison's deadline for compliance from 1993 to 1999. Several months later, when Lents attempted to restrict the size of the 1,300-acre Porter Ranch development project in the San Fernando Valley on the ground that it would generate greater traffic and pollution, he was attacked by the developers for his "declaration of war" on local decision making. Recently the agency approved the merger of Southern California Edison with San Diego Gas and Electric despite strenuous objections from virtually all local environmental organizations, which maintain that it would lead to serious ecological damage.

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# Political prisoners in the United States...

# Physical and sexual abuse by prison officials...

# Sensory deprivation and psychological torture...

# It's happening here and it must stop.

Two PBS documentaries, aired in June, showed 4 million television viewers a reality we won't ever see on "L.A. Law." "Through the Wire" exposed the Lexington Control Unit where women political prisoners, Alejandrina Torres, Susan Rosenberg and Silvia Baraldini, endured high-tech psychological torture for two years. "Framing the Panthers in Black and White" documented the government's dirty war against the Black Panther Party. These films reveal the existence of America's Mandelas. Political prisoners and *prisoners of war* — those who claim prisoner of war (POW) status under provisions of international law governing anti-colonial movements—sentenced to *decades* behind bars because of their participation in movements for freedom and human rights.

And there's more. Puerto Rican POW, Oscar Lopez Rivera has survived round-the-clock isolation for the past 45 months. Black activist, Mumia Abu Jamal, on death row in Pennsylvania, is the first *political prisoner* since Ethel and Julius Rosenberg to face imminent threat of execution.

More than 100 men and women are now behind bars as a result of their political actions and beliefs—imprisoned for their work in the Black/New Afrikan, Native American and Puerto Rican struggles for human rights and self-determination. The numbers of political prisoners from the white anti-imperialist and disarmament movements are growing. With the cry for human rights echoing around the world, the time to join U.S. political prisoners and POWs in pressing the demand for justice is now!

**Freedom Now: Campaign for Human Rights and Amnesty for Political Prisoners** needs your help.

Send urgently needed funds for the work of **Freedom Now**. Make checks ($50 *or less*) payable to **Freedom Now**. Make tax-deductible donations *over* $50 payable to **N.I.C.U.M.C.** A donation of only $10 will bring you a packet full of information detailing the many efforts to win human rights for US political prisoners.

Attend the **International Tribunal on US Political Prisoners and POWs**. Hunter College, New York City on December 8–9, 1990. For information or to make a donation call 212-860-4101.

Add your name to **Freedom Now's Urgent Action Network**. This growing network alerts people to crisis situations concerning political prisoners.

Photo credit: Ed Beyeler from his book, *Alcatraz*

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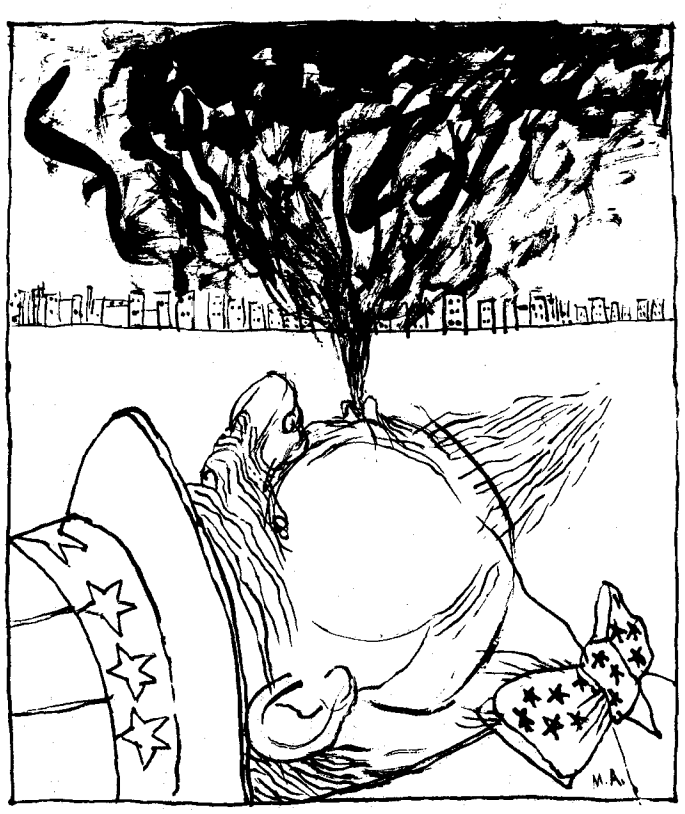
For the past year Watchdog activists and staff have been poring over A.Q.M.D. documents, including analyses of urban transportation, land use and air pollution, as well as public health studies from U.S.C. and the American Lung Association. We have initiated dozens of conversations with other environmental, labor and minority organizers to determine our analysis of the problem and our points of entry into the clean-air fight. We now have a two-year organizing plan.

§ *Targeting Corporate Power.* The cutting edge of environmental organizing depends on direct, multifaceted campaigns against corporate toxic polluters—the Du Ponts, the General Motors, the Dows and the Chevrons—involving tactics such as demonstrations, public education campaigns and large-scale consumer boycotts demanding the immediate cessation of a particular product or process and its replacement with an environmentally sound one. The object is to de-emphasize unproductive maneuvering with legislative and regulatory bodies and to create new models for direct action to change corporate policy.

We are studying a variety of possible corporate targets, paying special attention to lethal manufacturing processes or products, health and safety problems in the plant itself, a prior history of consumer and environmental abuses, racist practices in the United States and in the Third World, a manufacturing structure that could accommodate alternative processes and a consumer line of products that is vulnerable to mass market pressure.

We are also formulating proposals for a Superfund for Workers. The Superfund idea, conceived by Tony Mazzocchi of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers union, argues for some combination of employer and government funds for workers who lose jobs because of environmental demands. Without such a plan, as Richard Grossman and Richard Kazis explain in their book *Fear at Work*, workers are vulnerable to job blackmail by polluting firms as well as appeals by conservative labor leaders to follow corporate priorities. We are talking with workers, progressive union officials and elected officials at the county and state level about contractual and legislative demands for the Superfund for Workers as part of the cost of any toxic cleanup.



§ *Building a Membership Organization.* By the end of the year, we will initiate a six-month public information and organizing campaign with the goal of speaking to 150 to 200 union locals, community groups, environmental organizations and high school and college classes. But how do we convince people who already face numerous pressing social problems that air pollution warrants their energy and attention? We think it involves a straightforward intellectual appeal to their class interest and their broader political values.

The centerpiece of this campaign will be two pamphlets, both printed in Spanish and English. "L.A.'s Lethal Air: Why You Need to Become Involved in Cleaning It Up" will stress the health risks to children, workers, minorities, women and the elderly. "The Worker and Community Guide to the Clean-Air Fight" will analyze the pollution problem in Los Angeles and emphasize proposals for action. While it will include recommendations to the A.Q.M.D. and legislators, it will primarily offer concrete ideas—on public transportation, nonpolluting community economic development, housing, taxes, land use, zoning, workplace health and safety and industrial pollution reduction—that can be taken up both by the Watchdog and by unions, churches and other environmental organizations. Without such proposals, our public health information could threaten rather than motivate people.

Through teach-ins, discussions and debates, we hope to attract at least 250 members during 1991—not passive "dues payers" but activists with roots in their communities. Forming such a membership structure, with the wider circles of influence it can generate, is a prerequisite for even contemplating a countywide campaign against a corporate polluter.

§ *Advancing New Proposals and Coalitions.* Given the cause of so much of the pollution, any effective clean-air plan must involve a change in automobile engine design and energy source. But since 10 million cars of any design clogging up the city will pose significant problems (and "alternative fuels" like methanol have their downsides, such as the formation of formaldehyde, a known carcinogen), a progressive solution must involve extensive, affordable public transportation followed by a dramatic reduction in auto use.

Since autoworkers are one of our main constituencies, there is an apparent contradiction. But it is precisely the workers who have to take the leadership in pressing auto companies to introduce new technologies and products; thus Chris Mathis is studying proposals for public transportation and the electric car. The threatened G.M. Van Nuys plant, for example, which is already losing the Chevrolet Camaro and Pontiac Firebird, has its best long-term chance to stay open in building buses and low-polluting cars. Given the U.A.W. International's lobbying to weaken the federal Clean Air Act and its overall strategy of "nonadversarial" labor rela-

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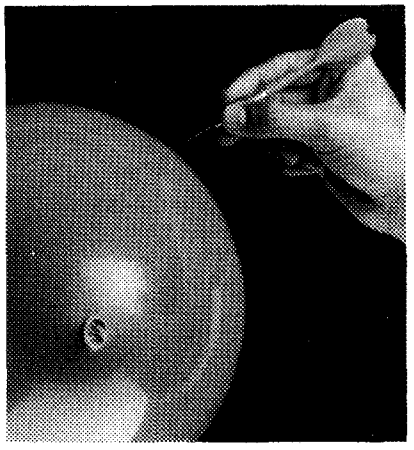

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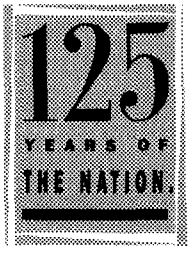


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tions, it is not going to challenge the Big Three on production decisions. We are therefore developing a strategy for getting U.A.W. progressives—locally and nationally in the New Directions movement, and internationally in the Canadian Auto Workers—to recognize both the necessity and the political opportunity for autoworkers to be in the forefront of a movement for less-polluting transportation vehicles.

For its part the A.Q.M.D., having no authority to regulate auto emissions, require new fuels or initiate public transportation, has concentrated on individual auto use. Its prominently deployed 1-800-CUT-SMOG billboards encourage individuals to turn in their neighbors for having belching tailpipes. It has also mandated employers to increase their workers' "average vehicle ridership." While claiming to be neutral as to the methods used, in practice it has just colluded with the County of Los Angeles in imposing parking fees of $70 to $120 a month on county workers who previously parked for free. The conservative majority on the county Board of Supervisors is enthusiastically "bargaining" with its unions to take away their benefits in the name of the environment. Again, it's clear who loses. Since almost 50 percent of all county workers are already in car pools or use the city's inadequate public transportation out of economic necessity, these parking fees simply punish those who can least afford to pay. And by the year 2010 downtown parking rates could soar to more than $30 a day, further compounding the pain of driving.

Anthony Downs of the Brookings Institution recently told *The Atlantic*, "The only solution to the traffic problem is to buy a BMW with comfortable seats, a high-quality sound system and car phone, and enjoy it as best you can." Los Angeles County janitors and clerical workers making $1,300 to $1,500 a month do not have those options, and the new parking policy has presented the first opportunity for the Watchdog to enter the fray. From the beginning S.E.I.U. Local 660 organized demonstrations of hundreds of workers in opposition to the plan. It also uncovered a scandal in the making. In memos to the Board of Supervisors, county administrator Richard Dixon admitted that the true intent of the parking strategy was to move county employees out of government-owned lots and transfer those lots to private developers, increasing capacity—and congestion and pollution as well.

In support of the S.E.I.U. we have exposed the county's plan in the local news media, testified at the A.Q.M.D. demanding that they rescind approval for the plan and joined workers in demonstrations. What is most encouraging is that the S.E.I.U. has gone beyond the "just say no" approach of many unions, crafting environmentally sound counterproposals: on-site child care to allow workers more flexible scheduling to avoid rush hour traffic, company-paid van pools and management-paid subsidies to employees (rather than penalties) for bus riding and car-pooling. Such proposals place the financial responsibility on county management rather than on the workers. If the combined pressure of the S.E.I.U., the Watchdog, the Coalition for Clean Air and the Natural Resources Defense Council is successful in getting the A.Q.M.D. to change its position, then the county will be forced to bargain with its workers without the hammer of "environmental approval."

For some, environmentally driven discussions about rebuilding oppressed communities, initiating nonpolluting economic development, redistributing wealth and challenging corporate power have a highly utopian ring, especially at this time in history. But in fact, the radical "reform demands" they imply are the most minimal efforts at social transformation that have even a fighting chance to reverse, let alone solve, the environmental crisis—and to capture the imagination of the people we want to organize.

Since 1982 many of us have helped to lead the Campaign to Keep G.M. Van Nuys Open, a powerful citywide movement that countered G.M.'s plans to shut down the last auto plant in the city with the threat of a consumer boycott. At the height of the movement, from 1982 to 1986, this organizing strategy channeled the anger not only of the 5,000 workers whose jobs would be lost in the closing but also of Latino garment workers, black ministers, politicians, actors, Catholic priests and small-business owners who were looking for a test case to reverse the corporate ascendancy of Reaganism.

Today corporate chieftains and their intellectual retainers are promoting the illusion that there is worldwide unanimity that "market forces" should govern human relations. We think, rather, that a large, untapped constituency, not only in Los Angeles but in the entire country, is well aware of the threat that concentrated corporate power poses to any hopes for economic and political democracy, and that this constituency is searching for some way to stand up and fight back. But from discussions with countless workers and community activists, who have experienced so many defeats in their efforts to change society during the 1980s, it is clear that any attempt to encourage a new wave of organizing must incorporate a well-thought-out tactical plan with at least some elements of a more comprehensive world view. For from the best days of the labor movement during the 1930s to the civil rights and antiwar struggles of the 1960s and 1970s, progressive social movements have had their greatest influence when they were able to combine the immediate and the long-term, the practical and the visionary.

Throughout this discussion I have taken the risk of projecting plans that we are well aware will be modified as they are carried out, and that have no guarantees of success. But since the Watchdog proceeds from a highly conscious organizing model, both its theory and practice and its setbacks and accomplishments can contribute to the discussion of new progressive strategies for the 1990s. □

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JULIAN
JULIEN
JUSTICE
KA(I)N(E)
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# BOOKS & THE ARTS.

## Embargoed Literature

EDWARD W. SAID

Eight years before Naguib Mahfouz won the Nobel Prize in Literature, a major New York commercial publisher known for his liberal and unprovincial views asked me to suggest some Third World novels for translation and inclusion in a series he was planning. The list I gave him was headed by two or three of Mahfouz's works, none of which was then in circulation in the United States. True, there were a few novels by the Egyptian master available in England, but these had never gained entry into the United States, and even in Europe were principally known only by a few students of Arabic. Several weeks after I submitted my list I inquired which novels had been chosen, only to be informed that the Mahfouz translations would not be undertaken. When I asked why, I was given an answer that has haunted me ever since. "The problem," I was told, "is that Arabic is a controversial language."

What, exactly, the publisher meant is still a little vague to me—but that Arabs and their language were somehow not respectable, and consequently dangerous, *louche*, unapproachable, was perfectly evident to me then and, alas, now. For of all the major world literatures, Arabic remains relatively unknown and unread in the West, for reasons that are unique, even remarkable, at a time when tastes here for the non-European are more developed than ever before and, even more compelling, contemporary Arabic literature is at a particularly interesting juncture.

An amusing sign of the disparity between the interest taken in Arabic literature and that in other literatures outside the Atlantic world can be seen in the treatment afforded Mahfouz and his work in English after he won the Nobel in 1988. Doubleday acquired the rights to much of his work and a few months ago began to introduce a handful of his stories and novels, including the first volume of his major work, the *Cairo Trilogy*, in what appeared to be new editions. In fact, with one exception, the translations were exactly the ones that had been available all along in England, some quite good but most either indifferent or poor. Clearly the idea was to capitalize on and market his new fame, but not at the cost of a retranslation.

Second, and more comically symptomatic, half a dozen profiles of Mahfouz appeared in American magazines, including *Vanity Fair*, *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times Magazine*. In effect, they were the same article rewritten over and over. Each talked about his favorite cafe, his modesty, his position on Israel (in the second sentence of its story on his Nobel Prize, *The New York Times* thoughtfully expressed the opinion of the Israeli consul in New York), his orderly and extremely uninteresting life. All of the authors, some of them reasonably accomplished essayists, were innocent of both Arabic and Arabic literature. (In *The New Yorker*, Milton Viorst delivered himself of the thought that "Arabic, an imprecise language, requires most writers to choose between poetry and clarity.") All regarded Mahfouz as a hybrid of cultural oddity and political symbol. Little was said about his formal achievements, for instance, or about his place in modern literature as a whole.

> *'The problem,' I was told, 'is that Arabic is a controversial language.'*

Third, now that the act has worn thin, Mahfouz has more or less been dropped from discussion—without having provoked even the more venturesome literati into finding out which other writers in Arabic might be worth looking into. Where, after all, did Mahfouz come from? It is impossible not to believe that one reason for this odd state of affairs is the longstanding prejudice against Arabs and Islam that remains entrenched in Western, and especially American, culture. Here the "experts" on Islam and the Arabs bear considerable blame. Their so-called *doyen*, Bernard Lewis, still blathers on in places like *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Atlantic* and *The American Scholar* about the darkness and strangeness of Muslims, Arabs, their culture, religion, etc. Israeli or Jewish scholars are commonly asked to comment on things Islamic while the reverse—an Arab commenting on Hebrew literature or Israeli policy—is seldom risked. Princeton University, one of the leading American centers of Arab and Islamic studies, does not have on its faculty a single native speaker teaching Arabic language or literature. Critics, book reviewers and journal editors studiously avoid discussion of Arabic books even as they attempt prodigies of reading and interpretation where, for instance, Czech and Argentine literatures are concerned.

The bald fact is, the unavailability of Arabic literature in translation is no longer an excuse. Small but conscientious publishing houses like Al-Saqi (26 Westbourne Grove, Bayswater, London W2 5RH) and Quartet (27-29 Goodge Street, London W1P 1FD) in England, Sindbad (1 Rue Feutrier, 75018 Paris) in France and Three Continents Press (1901 Pennsylvania Avenue, Suite 407, Washington, D.C.) in the United States have assembled a diverse cross section of contemporary work from the Arab world that is still overlooked or deliberately ignored by editors and book reviewers. In addition, some larger publishers (Penguin, Random House and a handful of American university presses) have recently put out some truly first-rate literary work that has gone unnoticed and unreviewed, as if indifference and prejudice were a blockade designed to interdict any attention to texts that do not reiterate the usual clichés about "Islam," violence, sensuality and so forth. There almost seems to be a deliberate policy of maintaining a kind of monolithic reductionism where the Arabs and Islam are concerned; in this, the Orientalism that distances and dehumanizes another culture is upheld, and the xenophobic fantasy of a pure "Western" identity elevated and strengthened. (Some of these reflections have been partially instigated by the truly disgraceful level of reporting on the Iraqi military aggression in Kuwait. Most of what has passed for journalistic and expert commentary in the United States media has been simply a repetition of appalling clichés, most of them ignorant, unhistorical, moralistic, self-righteous and hypocritical. All of them derive unquestioningly in one way or another from

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U.S. government policy, which has long considered the Arabs to be either terrorists or mindless stooges to be milked for their money or abundant and inexpensive oil.) What is disappointing is how little compensating pressure there is from the culture at large, one that seems automatically to prefer the Mahfouz rewrites and the Islamic stereotypes to almost anything else.

The irony is that there is a good deal in recent literary material to complicate and make more interesting the current Arab scene. In less than a year three books of unique literary distinction have appeared in fine translations yet gone virtually unnoticed. Each, in its own way, is both a dissenting or oppositional work and also a work by an author well-known and admired within the Arab and Islamic tradition. In other words, while each of these works treats Arab culture as something to be fought over and contested, thereby opposing orthodoxy, unjust authority and uncritical dogma, none of them expresses the kind of alienation and estrangement from the culture that is at work in attacks by Western Orientalists.

The most intellectually stimulating of the three is Adonis's *An Introduction to Arab Poetics*, from Al-Saqi, translated with uncommon intelligence by Catherine Cobham. (The University of Texas Press plans to bring out an edition of this next spring.) Adonis is today's most daring and provocative Arab poet, a symbolist and surrealist who is like a combination of Montale, Breton, Yeats and the early T.S. Eliot. In this compilation of four essays originally given as lectures at the Collège de France, he reinterprets the whole massive Arab tradition, from pre-Islamic poetry through the Koran, the classical period and on into the present. Arguing that there has always been a literalist, authoritarian strain in the literature, Adonis presents the thesis that this has usually been opposed by poets and thinkers for whom modernity is renewal rather than conformism, transgression rather than nationalism, creativity rather than fundamentalism.

Far from being simply an academic statement, *Arab Poetics* is an uncompromising challenge to the status quo that is held in place by official Arab culture. In no uncertain terms Adonis identifies the latter equally with religious and with secular authority, clerics and bureaucrats whose retreat into either a reliquary past or the arms of a foreign patron has brought us to the cultural crisis that we as Arabs face today. Adonis's command of the texts is astonishingly true, as is the simple brilliance of his argument. One would have thought it as important a cultural manifesto as any written today, which is what makes the silence that has greeted the work so stupefying.

The two other recent works are Edwar al-Kharrat's *City of Saffron* and the Lebanese feminist novelist Hanan al-Shaykh's *Women of Sand and Myrrh*, both published by Quartet, the first translated admirably by Frances Liardet, the latter with her customary fluency by Cobham. Kharrat is a Coptic Egyptian writer whose early years in Alexandria form the subject of this semi-autobiographical text, which bears a formal resemblance to Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Readers who have swallowed the journalistic myth that Copts and Muslims hate each other will be informed otherwise by these meditative yet subversively intimate ruminations about childhood. One feels not only the *non serviam* of the budding artist but also a warmly confident exploration of life in a working-class Coptic family beset with physical dislocation, unhappy sex, political upheaval. Here too it is possible to read Kharrat's revelations as very much a part of contemporary Egyptian culture without ever forgetting that he disputes


# SCANDINAVIAN FICTION

## The Impostor

By Peter Seeberg
Translated by Anni Whissen

In Scandinavia *The Impostor* occupies the same literary niche that *Catch-22* and *Catcher in the Rye* do in America. With great psychological intensity, the novel portrays the existential crisis of a would-be writer named Tom while it raises questions about the ethical choices made by him and others, the capacity for self-deception, the very nature of reality. $22.95 cl, $7.95 pa

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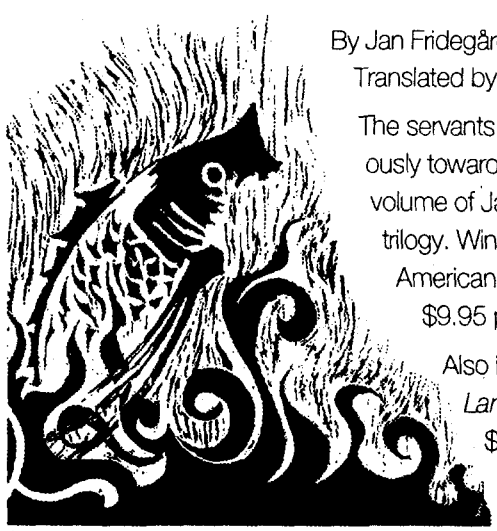

By Jan Fridegård
Translated by Robert E. Bjork

The servants of the powerful Vikings move tumultuously toward freedom in *Sacrificial Smoke*, the last volume of Jan Fridegård's much-acclaimed Holme trilogy. Winner of the 1987 Translation Prize of the American-Scandinavian Foundation. $24.95 cl, $9.95 pa

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the official establishment's facile versions of what "realism" and social responsibility are all about. Hanan al-Shaykh's novel is a complex and demanding story of women in the Persian Gulf—oppressed, manipulated, sexually tormented and confused. Far from simple romance, *Women of Sand and Myrrh* is both breathtakingly frank and technically difficult, taking on such experiences as homosexuality and patriarchy with unexpected power. Would that more Western feminists attended to writers like Shaykh and not just to the overexposed (and overcited) Nawal el-Saadawi.

It is less the explicit subject matter than the formal and technical achievement of these three works that is so striking, and so accurate an index of how excitingly far Arabic literature has come since Mahfouz was at his peak about twenty-five years ago. The best of today's writers are oppositional figures who frequently use literary virtuosity to form an oblique critique of life in the various Arab states, where tyranny and atavism are common features of daily existence but where a large number of writers are still committed to live. But, one should add, these writers are neither alone nor unaware of what surrounds and has preceded them. Other excellent translations (again, ignored by the Anglo-American literary world) have appeared of: Abdel Rahman Munif's monumental *Cities of Salt*, by Peter Theroux for Random House's Vintage Books, the only serious work of fiction that tries to show the effect on a gulf country of oil, Americans and local oligarchy; Gamal al-Ghitani's *Zayni Barakat* in the best of all translations, by Farouk Abdel Wahab, for Viking Penguin, a superbly elegant Jamesian novel about sixteenth-century Cairo, in effect an allegory of Nasser's rule with its combination of honest reformist zeal and political paranoia and repression; Elias Khoury's *The Little Mountain*, in Maia Tabet's spare translation for the University of Minnesota Press, a postmodernist fable of the Lebanese civil war; and Emile Habiby's great *Secret Life of Saeed the Ill-Fated Pessoptimist*, the surreal Palestinian masterpiece, in only a passable version by Trevor Le Gassick and Salma Jayyusi published by Readers International, which is nevertheless astonishing in its wit and dark inventiveness.

Other recent Arabic works include Hussein Haddawy's distinguished new translation for Norton of the *Arabian Nights*; the Sudanese Tayib Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, in an edition by the leading Arabic-English translator of our time, Denys Johnson-Davies, done for Heinemann in England and republished in the United States by Michael Kesend; Ghassan Kanafani's *Men in the Sun*, in Hilary Kilpatrick's rendition for Three Continents, a prescient parable of three Palestinian refugees trying to smuggle themselves from Iraq to Kuwait in a tanker truck, dying of asphyxiation and heat at the border post; the collection of poems by Mahmoud Darwish, Samih al-Qassim (today's leading Palestinian poets) and Adonis, *Victims of a Map*, in a bilingual Penguin edition rendered capably by Abdullah al-Udhari. Salih's novel can bear extremely favorable comparison with V.S. Naipul's *A Bend in the River*; despite their common source in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Salih's work is far less schematic and ideologically embittered, a novel of genuine postcolonial strength and passion.

There are also the enormous compilations by Salma Jayyusi being published over several years by Columbia University Press, of which *Modern Arabic Poetry: An Anthology* is the first to have appeared. It is fortunate that this relatively high number of recently translated Arabic works coincides with their importance and literary reputation in the Arab world. Nevertheless, it is also sadly the case that Arab writers themselves (as well as their publishing houses, ministries of culture, embassies in Western capitals) have done hardly anything to promote their works, and the discourse of Arab culture, in the West; the absence of an Arab cultural intervention in the world debate is thus depressing and tragic. I write these lines as the horrific waste and potential violence of today's gulf crisis focus all efforts on war and confrontation. Is it too much to connect the stark political and military polarization with the cultural abyss that exists between Arabs and the West? What impresses one is the will to ignore and reduce the Arabs that still exists in many departments of Western culture, and the unacceptable defeatism among some Arabs that a resurgent religion and indiscriminate hostility are the only answers. It may seem pathetically utopian to offer the reading and interpretation of contemporary literature as meliorative activities, but what is so attractive about the war now going on between Baghdad, the former Abbasid capital, and the entire West? □

# Applying the Brakes

JANE HOLTZ KAY

"NUC-LES," read a Maine license plate parked in front of an environmental conference I attended last spring. The whale and dolphin stickers on rear windows made a veritable school of marine life along New England's highways. In the shadow of Earth Day, these oceanic symbols of our endangered planet had been driven from land-grabbing exurbia on carbon-dioxide/monoxide-spewing cars so that the sticker-lovers could dwell on ending toxic this, noxious that and—it sometimes seemed as I listened to the drivers—pernicious urbanity.

For, as our L.L. Bean–clad crowd shot hot air on the environmental predicament we were compounding, it struck me as it would again and again in this post–Earth Day period, that these clean-air, clean-water, clean-land speakers might or might not be part of the solution, but they were surely part of the problem.

"Let's clean up the planet one home at a time," declared the back cover of my Seventh Generation catalogue offering a paper goods "starter kit" to save the planet. Maybe so. But the idyll expressed in the picture (a well-groomed lawn and a vegetable garden beside a sprawling single-family home) perpetuated the same anti-urban attitude. Reiterating the approach of the "take-nothing-but-pictures, leave-nothing-but-footprints" crowd, they were endorsing the pastoral myth and ignoring the real footprints: the footprints that compose the so-called built environment, *a k a* architecture. For, however many resources we recover, however much trash we recycle, the essential resource that we have trashed with such structures, such footprints, is the land. It is not only that our numbers have so multiplied and over-consumed that the suburban raccoon has replaced the wolf, the bald eagle and their exotic kin; not merely that our industrialists have poisoned air and stream. It is

*Jane Holtz Kay writes on architecture for* The Nation *and is currently doing research for a book on escaping auto-driven design.*

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the way we (the enemy, Us) have consumed the land.

The nation, as geographer Peirce Lewis pointed out at a Harvard University symposium on the new superscale way of building, "Changing Scale," went from mapping roads in circles radiating from cities to tracing a vast grid that has no center. His classic example was Los Angeles, whose roads were drawn in squares from day one; squares, not circles. America's postwar highways followed suit. Patterned for direct movement, not human settlement, the building that followed produced a centerless sprawling environment. Its car-based "edge cities," "urban villages"—or, more recently and accurately, "outcities," in the words of *Architecture* magazine—denied any semblance of urbanity or community in their form, if not their nomenclature. Two cars in every garage replaced the old chicken in every pot as a description of the living standards of a nation that drives one-third of the world's automobiles.

And so, as awareness has grown that oil both depletes and pollutes, environmentalists have begun to focus on the car as villain. In Los Angeles, the amount of fuel burned annually by cars idling in traffic equals seventy times that spilled by the Exxon Valdez, Greenpeace noted. "Car Sick," it called an article on this issue. "Cars Are Evil," the Conservation Law Foundation reiterated in the title of its lunchtime seminars, offering statistics on the damage done by the automania of our 5 percent of the world's population. By driving about "as many miles each year as the rest of the world combined," by making 80 percent of our trips in urban America by car (versus 50 percent in well-transitized Western Europe), by using 63 percent of the oil consumed in the United States for our transportation, Americans and our 140 million cars have degraded the environment. (For more such statistics, send $1 to the C.L.F., 3 Joy Street, Dept. N, Boston, MA 02108.)

Calculate the chlorofluorocarbons from automobile air conditioners, the toxic vapors from burning tire piles, the poisoning of underground water from gas tanks. Add the hidden cost of road salt and car disposal. Consider, as we have with headline urgency, massive defense budgets based on Persian Gulf oil-mongering, and a demolition derby seems too good an end for Henry Ford's four-wheeler.

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not confront our addiction to the "killer car" so simplistically, it seems. For when we pin the blame on General Motors et al., on "Roger and Me," we neglect the "Me." To anyone conversant with architecture and planning, blaming the car or driver is clearly blaming the victim. We drive, and not happily, because we have to; we have to because we possess no mass transit. We have no mass transit because we have not patterned our building with centers or communities of sufficient population density to assure the economic survival bewailed by the creators of new lines, from San Francisco's BART to the Los Angeles/Long Beach rail to D.C.'s Metro.

The litany is circular: The car is the killer, the agent of bad architecture and worse land-use practices, because we need it to get to exurbia. We fled to exurbia (what used to be called the country) partly because we made cities inhumane and untenable. We made them so partly by relinquishing almost half of urban America to the infrastructure to support the car (two-thirds in the case of Los Angeles), by underfunding the mass transit we had and by dedicating more land to hardtop than to housing, thereby removing it from taxation and further strapping our cities. And so on.

We know that the bless-this-house vision of the family home cross-stitched on the landscape is tattered. Yet the dream still survives as nightmare—the loneliness of suburban sterility—while its encasement in the landscape serves to gridlock public policy. Again in this Catch-22, we drive to the country because we don't want to stay home; we don't want to stay home because we have neglected our public spaces—we have few outdoor pools (unlike Sweden), tend poorly to our Walden Ponds and parks, and have only now begun to revive our city squares, plazas and waterfronts as spirited social places. It is not that we flee to nature. (Ironically, when we travel, we expect "flush toilets and hot and cold running water on the campgrounds," as a recreation director for the U.S. Forest Service told *The New York Times* this summer. We want to take short trips and walk on asphalt.) Suburbanites wander, looking for the vivacity that our alienating malls and lifeless environments deny. City-dwellers exit, escaping urban areas made repositories for the poor and abandoned. In the early 1970s, Charles Bronson, *Death Wish*'s architect, took action by shooting up New York's detritus. In the 1990s, Bill Murray's *Quick Change* city planner simply gives up, fleeces the city and beats a retreat.

For all our aborted Westways and chopped-off Embarcadero Drives, this degradation by auto design endures. No moss has grown on the highway departments of America. Boston is girding itself for "The Big Dig," burying an intrusive Central Artery for $5 billion but, alas, replacing it with ten lanes of cars, a spaghetti of highway above the Charles River banks but no mass transit. The Merritt Parkway needs to be expanded, say Connecticut officials, thereby downing its splendidly carved bridges and boulevard ambiance. The advocates of an outer beltway around Washington, D.C., push on, planning to devastate open space and habitats and encourage traffic, as if we hadn't learned that the answer to Ada Louise Huxtable's classic collection, *Will They Ever Finish Bruckner Boulevard?* is, "No, never."

We are still back in the 1950s. Or even the 1920s, when the chief engineer of the West Side Highway wrote what could have been an axiom for the auto age: "While a roadway of this capacity may appear adequate for the requirements, I am firmly convinced that within a very short period after its completion the proposed structure would be overcrowded and its efficiency seriously crippled by reason of the necessity of sacrificing speed to provide for an excessive volume of traffic."

Such traffic in old ideas proves itself ever more deadly as the Middle East ills add to the environmental ones. And yet, it is clear that there are alternatives on the drawing board and that, above all, the environmental movement could cut into this cycle and change this mind-set. Wrenching ourselves out of the auto age into other possibilities, a design for a small planet could emerge as the most positive thing that has happened to both design and the environment.

Throughout the country, there is an impulse to go back to denser living spaces, to revive Main Street, to shape true communities with walking centers for the young, the elderly and all the rest of us, as they were before World War II. Shrink-

NOTRE DAME DES TOURISTS

And then one afternoon in Paris
you stumble on a church you can't find
in your guidebook, the more welcome

this late hour for that, its air already incensed
for centuries at all you'll all too soon let go—
its proper name, the name of any but the pagan god Nike,

worshipped these latter days down to his shoes.
Off your worn feet you immodestly ease his brand,
toasting it with the swig you sneak of mineral water.

Her statue stands on an altar, unmoved,
bare feet in guttering vigil lights,
the blue patroness of the halt, the lame phrases

led by the guardian angel Berlitz
back to earthly travail from the limbo of French I.
Blessed be the evensong unsung,

the confessionals empty this *cinq à sept*
while native husbands rush their mistresses
through devotions due the blue-stained hour.

Spade by shovel, earth has been moved,
old gravestones laid to rest, paving the aisle.
Dust returns to dust down a shaft of light,

devil by devil. So you'll turn back
to a life laying claim to be your own,
unbeliever shriven of all you've been while gone.

Traveler, *où est l'Hôtel du Progrès?*
*L'Hôtel du Commerce? La rue des Martyrs?*
The bread, the wine, *le Burger King*?

*Debora Greger*

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ing the streets would release 30 to 60 percent of our cities given over to the auto, as Richard Register has pointed out in *Ecocity Berkeley* (North Atlantic Books); this diagram for tomorrow, in which building compactly saves fossil fuels, supplies the population density for mass transit and encourages community, is becoming a starting point for other urban builders, too.

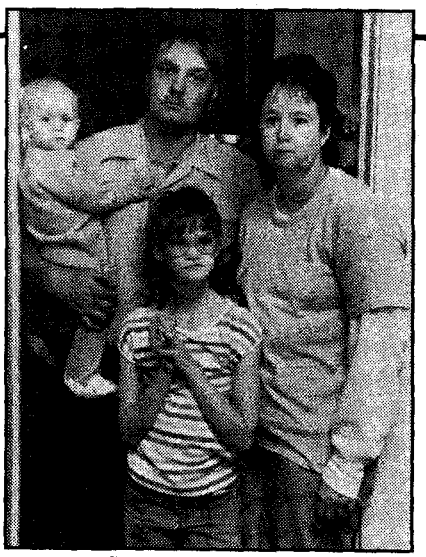
For what else is the much-publicized *The Great Good Place* (Paragon)—subtitled *Cafes, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts and How They Get You Through the Day*—but a cry against the losses caused by auto-infested, mall-bound America? Asked how he would explain human behavior, a psychologist suggested that he merely needed to know where the individual in question was located, Ray Oldenburg records in this book. "If the person is in church, he 'acts church.' If he's in a post office, he 'acts post office.' The implications are, of course, tremendous," Oldenburg observes. "Experiences occur in places conducive to them, or they do not occur at all. When certain kinds of places disappear, certain experiences also disappear." A narrowing of habitat is a narrowing of experience, in urban as in natural life.

"If we valued fraternity as much as independence, and democracy as much as free enterprise," Oldenburg concludes, "our zoning codes would not enforce the social isolation that plagues our modern neighborhoods, but would require some form of public gathering place every block or two." The sociologist needs to reorder his priorities. We need the urban blocks *before* the hangouts. We need to go back to filling each hundred feet with a city block, not a Levittown lot, it seems to me. But Oldenburg's "places" do provide the social brew we so sorely lack a step away.

A step away. That is also what the growing pedestrian movement endorses. In the decade since the second Boulder, Colorado, pedestrian conference labeled 1980 "The Year of the Pedestrian," walking has gained allies. Across the country, pedestrian advocates have worked to ameliorate the walker's (i.e., city-dweller's) environment. From the politicized WalkBoston to New York's more episodic Shore Walkers, pedestrian advocacy groups have collected. A combination of hikers and urbanists in some half-dozen groups agitate for curbing the car, according to *Walking* magazine, a four-year-old publication with 430,000 subscribers that is itself a testimony to the movement afoot. By endorsing positive measures to "promote awareness of walking as a transportation alternative," by lobbying for "zoning changes which permit mixed-use developments and enable people to walk from home to jobs, schools and stores," in WalkBoston's words, the public-policy orientation of such advocates helps create safe, pleasant walkable cities that would be "synonymous with livability and charm."

What else, too, is Seaside, the Florida Panhandle mecca for planners, but a pre-auto pedestrian place? The architects who promote this route out of the car-trap have created a new Main Street based on vintage walking cities. Seaside is a pastel paradise whose design dictates for sidewalks, porches and the like go back to the nineteenth-century grid. So, too, New York's more urban mid-1980s Battery Park City design is based on walking precedents. Their heirs now on the drawing board proliferate, from Alexandria, Virginia, to Sacramento, California. Seaside's own designers, Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zybek, now at work in Kentlands, Maryland, will in-


# Help a needy family have a decent place to live.



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Jimmy Carter


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clude one more new/old element in all this: a work space, to link their latest tightly woven neighborhood to its historic precedent in a fuller way.

"Transportation Alternatives" is how *Landscape Architecture* magazine rightly sums up these communities. "Pedestrian Pockets" is the phrase of San Francisco's Peter Calthorpe, another architect active in devising intimate neighborhoods. On the East Coast, Randall Arendt is a circuit rider trying to supplant the standard subdivision with car-free modes, as spelled out in the useful *Dealing With Change in the Connecticut River Valley: A Design Manual for Conservation and Development* (Lincoln Institute of Land Policy and the Environmental Law Foundation). Throughout the region, Arendt preaches the English model—towns that are towns and country that is country, dense urban centers and liquid lovely rural surroundings—pre-auto design made palatable to a new age.

Looking to the historical model means far more than today's architectural pastiche of gables and Palladian windows applied to cutesy cul-de-sac condominiums tied to the umbilical cord of road. It means centered places based on older, denser modes, on streets of row houses; on, say, two-family dwellings that support the corner store and walk-in post office of lamented memory. And adherents are aware of that. When even the mainstream show *This Old House* chooses to devote its fall series to the three-decker house—that working-class model of a detached three-family row house blending ownership and rental, light on four sides and the density to support true neighborhood—there is hope that everything old can be new again.

So, too, alternatives to the fragmented single-family life style grow, attracting a constituency on social as well as environmental grounds. Co-housing advocates, inspired by the Danish approach to building shelter with common day-care, kitchen facilities and the like, meet in a dozen cities from Berkeley to Amherst, Massachusetts. *New Households, New Housing* (Van Nostrand Reinhold) records several forms of collective housing that have evolved. The essays, edited by Karen A. Franck and Sherry Ahrentzen, range, but stem from the shared, socialized ways of building the "kitchenless house" espoused by feminist Charlotte Perkins Gilman at the turn of the last century. Whether row houses in Toronto or apartments in the Heights in San Diego, the shoulder-to-shoulder building they advocate goes beyond the Little House on the Prairie image to more cooperative, congenial living than the haphazard, developer-driven land use that has asphalted our environment.

Politically, then, these and other ideas grow; long before the Iraq fires, they were becoming ever more plausible, and fertile, grounds for environmental action. Their alternative—gridlock—stirs America, making even the unspeakable (a gas tax!) an option, causing even California voters to lip-sync a chorus of taxes for highway repair and mass transit.

Can such geopolitical and popular impulses combine with an awareness of the fragility of the planet to erase our American Graffiti auto culture? They could vanish, to be sure, like Lewis Mumford's greenbelt dreams, which ended with nothing more than the lingering vision of Sunnyside, New York, or Radburn, New Jersey, housing enclaves. Or they could become rallying points to create a kinder, gentler landscape based on old Olmsted and topical bioregional modes.

The fearsome Westway highway is the most recent instance of such a transformation. Once slated to sunder Manhattan's West Side from the Hudson River and blight miles of neighborhoods, it succumbed to changing times and local activism. Out of the anti-Westway agitation now comes a proposal that could replace the vilified ten-lane highway idea with a walkway/bikeway. If, as supporters anticipate, New Yorkers approve the environmental quality bond act in November, a $100 million portion of its funds will finance construction (to be matched by the same amount from the city), and a four-and-a-half-mile waterwalk could rise—the longest waterfront esplanade in America.

Restoring the environment is not exclusively a question of aesthetics, of course. And yet by making the earth "beautiful," we make it whole. When Phoenix and Palm Beach County use landscape architects to groom their former dumps and recycling centers, they display a reverence for the planet and its people. When the advocates of the Hudson River Greenway or New Jersey Pinelands or Lowell parks proceed, they are conservationists in the fullest sense: urban, suburban and rural.

Such solutions do not impose pain; they apply the pleasure principle. In fact, they seem so central to the leave-nothing-but-footprints ethic that it is hard to understand why back-to-nature exclusivists ignore them. Imbued by the quick fix that got us in trouble, too many whole earth activists instead seem to concentrate on such activities as the technology of creating new sources of energy for the automobile. Such concessions to a weary grow-and-go policy contradict their very axiom that from a least-cost standpoint, conserving energy is almost always less expensive than producing new. Their eco-wash auto-industry allies should be suspect enough to make environmentalists warily pause to consider the whole view.

Holistic means just that for all parties. Land-use reformers, too, could expand their outlook. (A couple of weeks before Earth Day, at a Lincoln Institute of Land Policy luncheon held to present Randall Arendt's planning views, the luncheonware was as wasteful as the land use deplored. From one end of the table to the other, I felt compelled to "just say no" a dozen times—no to the plastic plate, no to the plastic knife, fork and spoon wrapped in cellophane, no to the napkins and the unrecyclable bottle of juice. After our land-use planning lecture, as our refuse filled a plastic bag, I offered the view that maybe we should skip the plastic. The man in charge looked at me as if I'd asked to dump my orange rinds and create a compost pile in the reception room.)

We must focus on curbside recycling from every point of view, then, but nowhere so much as from the ground up. Earth Day must be a true earth alert. For the environmental movement to succeed, it must go back to the land in the most basic way. We must not only drive less, bathe less and trash less but politicize more for this kind of stewardship of the land. □

# FILMS.

STUART KLAWANS

**Wild at Heart**

A film projectionist nods off in his booth and starts to dream. Separating itself from his slumbering form, a twin rises, takes from the wall a twin of his hat and goes down into the movie house to stand in the aisle and watch the film the dreamer is projecting. Then the twin approaches the screen and walks into the film.

Buster Keaton's adventure in *Sherlock Junior* has served for over sixty years as a model of how people watch movies. Not that all pictures work on an audience this way; but films, perhaps more than

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any other artworks, tend to set up a running commentary on their own unreality. They are like dreams in which one is aware of dreaming.

Many of the best movies balance this tendency with other characteristics of film: its unsurpassed ability to document the world; its forcefulness as a medium for argument; its rhythmic play of light and shadow, sound and silence, which allows it to border on the plastic arts. I'm thinking at the moment of Renoir's *The Crime of Monsieur Lange* and Fassbinder's *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*, which played recently in New York at the Public Theater and the Bleecker Street Cinema. You may supply examples of your own, but they won't be many. Fully realized, four-dimensional films are rare. What you see most often are movies in which the tendency toward self-conscious fantasy predominates—which brings us to David Lynch.

Like a creature that has developed a single, oversized organ at the expense of the rest of its withered body, Lynch is a misshapen talent, oddly evolved to fit an odd cultural niche. He hasn't the slightest interest in the world around him. His images invariably seem to emerge from a soundstage, even when shot on location. His actors reveal only the gestures and turns of phrase of other actors. You will never feel the shock of recognition in a Lynch film, only shock itself. Nor is there a purpose to the jolt. Though Lynch's abundant stock of absurdities, incongruities and asides sometimes teases the viewer with a hint of profundity, nothing adds up in his pictures. He is as incapable of argument as of documentation. What he *can* do—and he does it supremely well—is draw the viewer into that mood of willful oneirism, using visual effects that are both dazzling and indelible.

*Wild at Heart* is his latest foray into the land of waking dreams. Based on a novel by Barry Gifford and photographed by Lynch's longtime collaborator Frederick Elmes, it is the story of young lovers on the run, from a Carolinas town called Cape Fear to New Orleans to a hellhole known as Big Tuna, Texas. Nicolas Cage plays Sailor; Laura Dern plays Lula. But the names don't really matter, since the characters are generic. They're the guy who dreams he's Elvis and the girl who's haunted by her past.

The proceedings get started with a bang. Immediately after the credits, there's an uncommonly bloody killing, which lands Sailor in jail. On his release—effected with a simple title card, an-


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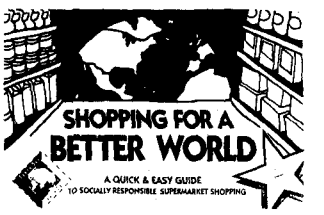
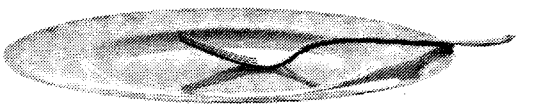
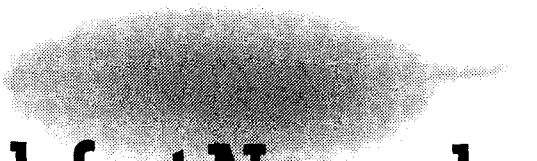



**Sometimes you are what you don't eat.**





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Don't eat on the Thursday before Thanksgiving. Then join six million Americans, who since 1973, have mailed the money they saved to our life-giving projects.

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Write: "Fast for a World Harvest," 115 Broadway, Dept. 4000, Boston, MA 02116. Or call for more information: (800) 225-5800.

☐ I'd like to FAST to help fight world hunger.

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My phone number is _____

4802

Send information about how I can help to:

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nouncing that time has passed—Lula picks him up in a black Thunderbird convertible. Cool cars, sunglasses and plenty of rock music are essential to a filmmaker of Lynch's aspirations. So, too, is dialogue that sounds like *Cliffs Notes* for the movie. Such is Sailor's comment when Lula hands him his beloved snakeskin jacket: "For me, it is a symbol of individuality and my belief in personal freedom." Then it's off for some hot sex, more rock and roll, more hot sex, a few flashbacks of violence. What can the lovers possibly do for a follow-up, except leave the state and break Sailor's parole?

What follows is mannered, arch, empty, labored, expertly made and intermittently thrilling. Though scene flows effortlessly into scene—no one is better than Lynch at transitions—I remember the events in pieces. A man on fire runs through a suburban living room. A young woman, injured in a car wreck, pokes uncomprehendingly at the bloody hole in her scalp. Lula, undergoing an abortion, lies under a doctor's magnifying lamp, her face appearing outsized while her tiny arms thrash helplessly. Many of the shots are enthralling, even when they're without incident—for example, the view of the roadside at night, seen as a horizontal band of shadowy green, rushing past beneath impenetrable blackness. There are also a few sequences, full of incident, that pull you all the way into the dream. The best of them, the great set piece of *Wild at Heart*, is a confrontation in a motel room between Lula and Bobby Peru (Willem Dafoe), Big Tuna's incarnation of evil. It's so intense an encounter that I could all but feel the breath coming through Bobby's rotten teeth.

Then Bobby left. He had shown his power over Lula; and Lynch had demonstrated much the same thing to me. Once more, he had proved he could push my buttons, and once more he'd turned out to have no good reason for pushing them. I felt used. I also felt that this scene, like certain episodes of *Blue Velvet*, exposed the vacuum in Lynch. In its own sick way, *Wild at Heart* is as much a brainless, heartless spectacle as *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*. The difference is that Spielberg engineered his movie-as-rollercoaster for a general audience. Lynch constructs his for an audience that wants to feel wised-up, decadent, better than the Spielbergian middle class.

At this point, Lynch's fans, most of my friends among them, might object that his dreams are so troubled that one's complicit enjoyment of them is itself an act of culpability. By taking to a personal extreme the oneiric and plastic qualities of film, he draws the audience into a more conscious engagement with its desires. It sounds plausible; and if movies are indeed commentaries on a dream rather than mirrors of reality, what more can they honestly offer? So let me suggest a counterexample: Brian DePalma's *Blow Out*, a film so self-enclosed that *The Village Voice*'s J. Hoberman has likened it to a Möbius strip.

*Blow Out* is, in fact, a circular story with a twist, and it's all surface. Based explicitly on Antonioni's *Blow-Up*, with an added debt to Coppola's *The Conversation*, the picture is at every level a film about film. The protagonist lives within movies. His setting, too, is made up: a mythical city named Philadelphia, central to the history of an imaginary nation called the United States. In this never-never land, the women all have to sell their bodies in one way or another to survive, while the men make a living selling each other pictures of the women. You realize, of course, that this is a fantasy; and DePalma tells you as much in every way he knows how. Still, you leave the theater devastated for these phony characters in their invented country, and for yourself and your own nation as well. For all its artifice, *Blow Out* has weight, purpose, moral power. It's not a balanced film, but it's a great one.

*Wild at Heart*, on the other hand, is not only lopsided and brilliant but utterly cynical as well. That's a striking conjunction, given the way Lynch's work has been received. His best-known production, *Twin Peaks*, made its mark by providing just what we all want from television—sex, violence and easy laughs—delivering them more amply than the competition and with greater style. So why don't people just say that *Twin Peaks*—and *Wild at Heart* and *Blue Velvet*—are cheap thrills in expensive wrappers? (To take one example out of many: *The New York Times* puffed *Wild at Heart* just before its release by lauding the "unsettling vision" of David Lynch, "the reigning master of locating the bizarre, the surreal and the disturbing in American life.") You'd think, for all the hype, that Lynch's pictures were works of pioneering artistry, suitable to be stuck on a museum wall right next to *Un Chien Andalou*. More likely, though, they're empty artifacts of that cultural niche I mentioned at the beginning of this piece, the milieu of the institutional avant-garde.

Whenever you hear the words *disturbing*, *transgressive* and *subversive* tossed around, whenever rules are supposedly being broken and authorities challenged, you may assume you're in avant-garde territory. You're among the institutional avant-garde when the transgressors have M.F.A. degrees from good schools and are on a first-name basis with at least three arts administrators. This is the setting in which the avant-garde becomes avant-gardism, one more item in a repertory of styles—an approved, accredited part of the curriculum, to be studied in academies and practiced for the approbation of one's fellow professionals. If Lynch is a pioneer, it's because he has converted this outrage-by-the-numbers avant-gardism into mainstream, commercial success. Think of him as the boy voted Most Likely to Succeed, in a school where the other class notables include Robert Mapplethorpe and Karen Finley.

We might as well forgive the average tourist from Mars for assuming that the names I've just brought together represent America's greatest contemporary artists. Is that entirely a function of notoriety—

TREES IN THE NIGHT

With grief and finally helpless we had come to bury
the last of our love beneath the immense, swaying pines.
Months they had surrounded our sleep and our waking.
Months we had listened to their rumors of storm or of calm
so it seemed only right to grieve with them one final time—
such human grief to think they would care if they could.

There was nothing to say or so much—blame and reprisal—
it couldn't be spoken. Months we had loved
the golden finches shooting like arrows of sunlight
through branches fifty, sixty feet high. How many trees?
We stood in cool patches quiet with needles and ferns.
Such a grief—solitary, dark—still thinking of itself in the plural.

*David Baker*

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sought-after and profitable in one case, unwanted in the others, who had their fame thrust upon them by a cabal of sleazoid politicians and Bible-thumpers? Or is there a real resemblance among these classmates?

Before answering, let me assure the reader that I am far from wanting to blame anyone for falling victim to Jesse Helms. More than that: I endorse the right of all artists to as much government money as they can grab, no strings attached. By all means, let the institutional avant-garde join with the Metropolitan Museum and the Metropolitan Opera to rejoice in the National Endowment for the Arts' $171 million a year. Better still, why not give the institutional avant-garde its own savings and loan? If James Fail could acquire the Bluebonnet Savings Bank along with $1.85 billion in federal subsidies after putting up just $1,000 of his own money, then surely we can do as much for Karen Finley and her friends.

Nevertheless, if we can bear for a moment to forget public policy and think about art, we might notice a powerful odor of bad faith arising from the vicinity of the institutional avant-garde. It's the smell of subversion that wants to be risk-free. First comes the self-validating gesture of declaring that all works of art should aspire to the condition of avant-gardism, if they're to be taken seriously; then comes the refusal to play out the consequences. For example: It's shabby to complain that performance artists, those descendants of the Dadaists, will soon have nowhere to perform, given that all the major venues receive government funds. Think of the *real* Dadaists in Berlin, who staged their events not in art galleries or at the local equivalent of Lincoln Center but in churches and bars and cafes, especially the ones where they weren't welcome. Think of the Berlin Dadaist Franz Jung, who in 1923 chose to express himself by hijacking a German freighter in the Baltic and taking it to Petrograd, where he turned the ship over to the Soviet authorities. There's an avant-gardist I can respect.

What I can't respect is work that denies all of the traditional, nontransgressive functions of art while simultaneously turning away from the risks of engagement with the world. Sometimes, on the excuse of favoring strong content over mere style, the artists and their flacks turn against the notion of formal skill. Sometimes, as with David Lynch, formal skill is all the artist provides. In either case, the presumed assault on bourgeois order is safely contained—in an art gallery, at a performing arts center, on the screen. The danger of the image is assumed; the image of danger is all that's demanded.

I came out of *Wild at Heart* feeling sick of images, sick of irony, sick of a copycat avant-garde that's addicted to money and applause. The poor get locked out of their jobs, get tossed out of their homes, get shot by stray bullets at the rate of one a day; and the college-educated play at wanting to be disturbed.

Tourists from Mars, wherever you travel next, try to speak kindly of us. The truth is too great a shame.

*Screening Schedule:* Anthology Film Archives in New York will be showing three features by Aki Kaurismäki—*Crime and Punishment*, *Shadows in Paradise* and *Calamari Union*—until September 9.

From September 10-16 at Anthology Film Archives, the Fourth New York Lesbian and Gay Experimental Film Festival will be on view. Some selections to watch for: Isaac Julien's *Looking for Langston*, Shirley Clarke's now-classic *Portrait of Jason* and the U.S. premiere of a film by Rosa von Praunheim, *Survival in New York*.

*Berkeley in the Sixties*, a smart, straightforward and very engaging documentary by Mark Kitchell, will be playing at the NuArt Theater in Los Angeles September 19-25; at the Dobie Theater in Austin, Texas, September 21-27; and at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis September 26-28. Keep the dates open. The film will also be shown in New York September 26–October 9 at the Film Forum. (The long-awaited re-opening of the Film Forum was scheduled for September 5.)

*Nation* readers in Los Angeles might also want to mark the calendar for October 13-14, when the NuArt will show Ralph Arlyck's *Current Events*. More essay than documentary, the film is Arlyck's meditation on what his grandfather might have meant by "being a *mensch*." In search of the answer, Arlyck goes to a medical clinic in a drought-stricken area of Senegal; to the village of Jinotega in Nicaragua, in the midst of the *contra* war; to the home of Amnesty International workers in Colorado; and winds up finding *mensch*hood in a swimming pool in Poughkeepsie. It's an unusually thoughtful and well-made film—a great antidote to the evening news, or to *Wild at Heart*. □


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# Crossword Puzzle No. 2303

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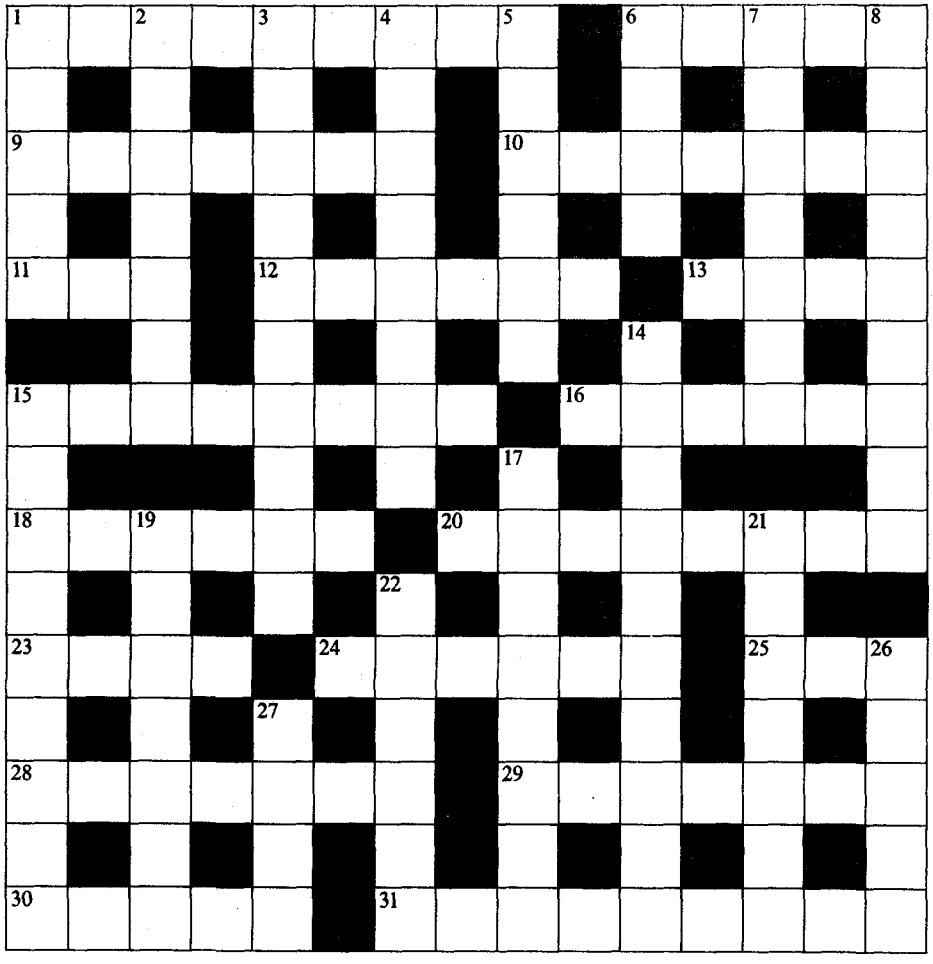

ACROSS

1 Jack, being particularly English (a face type here) might have been a jester in the old days! (5.4)
6 See 25
9 This can (used incorrectly) shows what a military flag has to be, to be carried. (7)
10 At one time, you could have bet where you could find an ace, perhaps! (7)
11, 15 down and 6 down Did Marilyn's co-star consider it a scratch performance? (3,5-4,4)
12 See 25
13 and 27 down Decidedly the "can-do" type, but all wrong! (8)
15 With a strong accent, possibly. (8)
16 One of two things on a dress coat, perhaps alternatively one who cuts it. (6)
18 Slides clear with it or is it the one who sees such? (6)
20 Medic, perhaps, having a few extra words to mother "ingrained." (8)
23 For example, 26 and 14? "Amen!" after a fashion! (4)
24 They should carry some weight in the financial world! (6)
25, 6 and 12 In Mrs. Deer, a bad night having to eat in Paris becomes the selfish type. (3-2-3-6)
28 To 23 someone a 1 down, for example? (7)
29 Silliness in a warped tiny way! (7)
30 Ore is refined by one in *The African Queen*. (5)
31 Dark horse which might frighten one. (9)

DOWN

1 and 19 Take stock in the fur trade; perhaps one makes digs so, in retaliation! (12)
2 Proving a relative has a right to be somewhat fuzzy. (7)
3 One reputedly makes the work assignment difficult—*a k a* Mt. Stress! (10)
4 The place of battle in two wars ends near destruction. (8)
5 Suggests being "detailed" like a ship has to be at times. (6)
6 See 11 across
7 Is the pilot as confused by something you might attach a sheet to? (7)
8 A fast diner might apologize if he has to, going under at an unusual display. (3,3,3)
14 See 26
15 See 11 across
17 Representing the borderlines of what the kangaroo might be doing? (8)
19 See 1 down
21 A drink created by the revolutionary establishment? (7)
22 New fashion created by one who might take care of you? (6)
26 and 14 Writer-gent of the French half of the Kenya revolutionary group represented in the act of walking. (3,2,9)
27 See 13 across

SEE LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION AT LEFT


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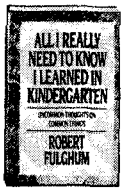


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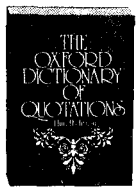


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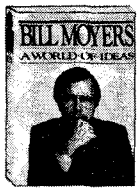


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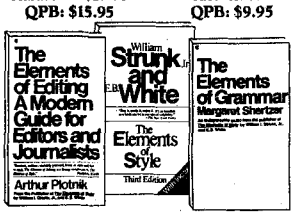


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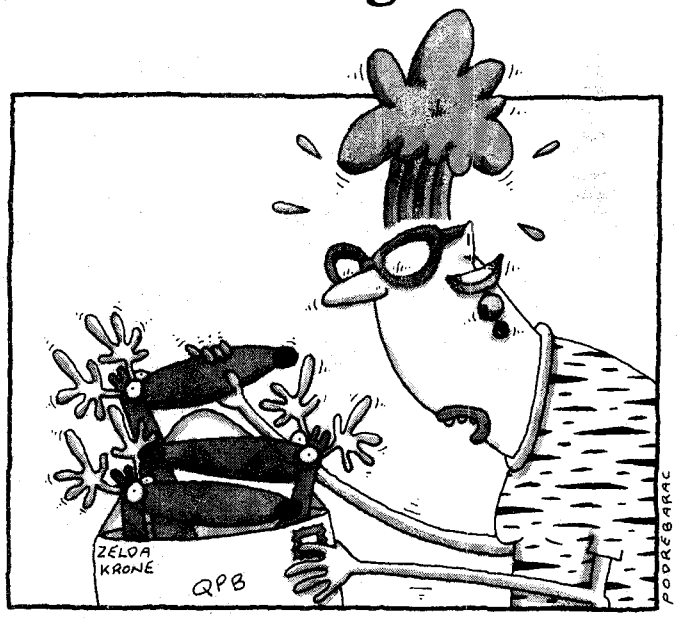


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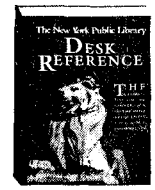


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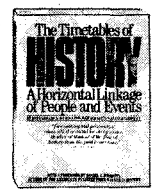


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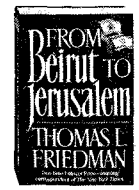


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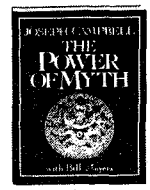


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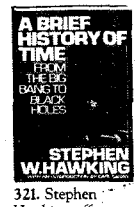


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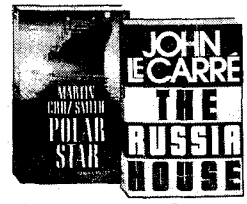


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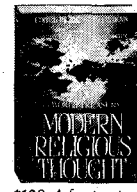


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